THE FOUNDER REINTERPRETED: KŪKAI AND *VRAISEMBLANT* NARRATIVE

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE DIVISION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

IN

EAST ASIAN LANGUAGES AND LITERATURES (JAPANESE)

MAY 2003

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to Professor Arthur Thornhill, my advisor and thesis chair, for his constant support and guidance throughout this project. I would also like to thank Professors Robert Huey and Joel Cohn for serving on my thesis committee and providing me with valuable insights. Professor George Tanabe from the Department of Religion graciously took time out of his busy schedule to discuss an earlier version of this project with me. I am also deeply indebted to Professor Alexander Vovin for the training and guidance I received from him throughout the years.

I would also like to thank graduate students Christopher Callahan, Kerri Russell, and Kaoru Villa for their constant support of my work.

This thesis is the culmination of a research project I began when I was a Monbusho Research Student at Keio University in Tokyo. I am grateful to Professors Sekiba Takeshi, Iwamatsu Kenkichirō, and graduate students Tokutake Yoshiaki and Ōhashi Naoyoshi for their generous academic guidance. I am also grateful to the Ministry of Education of Japan and the Keio University International Center for providing me with financial and logistical support during my stay there.

Finally, I wish to thank my friends and family for all their support throughout the years.

This thesis would not have been completed without the people I just named. However, any errors that remain are entirely my own.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KT	*Kokushi taikei*
KZ	*Kōbō Daishi Kūkai zenshū*
NKBT	*Nihon koten bungaku taikei*

Chapter One
Introduction

In 1982, the Yomiuri Shimbunsha published *Watashitachi no Kūkai* (Our Kūkai) to commemorate the 1,150th anniversary of Kūkai's death. On the cover is a picture of a manuscript of the famous *iroha* poem.[1] Although authorship of this poem has traditionally been ascribed to Kūkai, evidence from historical linguistics and literary studies[2] makes it highly unlikely that he actually wrote it. In addition to authoring the *iroha* poem, Japanese "folk history" credits Kūkai with great public works projects in his native Shikoku, using esoteric ritual to cure plagues and famines, driving his staff into the earth to bring forth water, and creating the *hiragana* syllabary. However unlikely these feats may seem, the fact that they are retold and published in various formats suggest they are firmly established in Japanese folk history. Throughout the centuries, Kūkai legends have appeared in different formats.

[1] The *iroha* poem is a 47 syllable poem that is supposedly the Japanese translation of a *gatha* that appears in the *Nirvana Sutra.* However, since the *iroha* poem uses each Japanese syllable only once, it was also used to classify things. The poem is:

Iroha nihohedo	Although their hues are vivid,
Chirinuru wo	The blossoms scatter;
Wagayo tare zo	Who in this world of ours
Tsune naramu	Is forever?
Ui no okuyama	Today I cross
Kefu koete	The deep mountains of karma,
Asaki yume miji	No longer seeing shallow dreams.
Ehimosezu	No longer inebriated (Asao Naohiro, et. al. eds., *Kadokawa Nihonshi jiten* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1996), 87)

Unless otherwise noted, the translations that appear in this thesis are my own.

[2] The linguistic evidence that the *iroha* poem was not written by Kūkai is that the poem only has five vowels. During Kūkai's lifetime (the late Nara/early Heian period), the Japanese language had seven vowels. Since the poem supposedly uses each syllable once, one would expect that the other two vowels would be included in the poem. The literary evidence is that the *iroha* poem is written in the *imayō* style, which did not become popular until the late Heian period, almost three centuries after Kūkai's death. It is more likely that the poem was written in the late tenth or the early eleventh century. (Asao, et. al., 84, 87, Nakamura Hajime, et. al., eds., *Iwanami Bukkyō Jiten* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten 1989), 46)

Legends about the esoteric Buddhist leader have appeared in biographies, hagiographies, legend collections written in classical Chinese, legend collections written in Japanese, paintings, and illustrated manuscripts. Indeed, Kūkai is one of the central figures of Japanese folk history: a 1934 compilation of biographical works written before 1868 contains 93 works in 134 volumes.[3] The continuing vitality of these kinds of legends raises the issue of how legends mediate, and are mediated, over history.

By traditional accounts, Kūkai studied Confucianism from childhood, and only later "discovered" Buddhism while a student at the State Confucian College.[4] After spending some time roaming around Shikoku as a lay ascetic Buddhist practitioner, he was ordained by Gonsō[5] of Iwabuchidera. Later, Kūkai accompanied Ambassador Fujiwara-no-Kadonomaro (藤原葛野麻呂、755-818) on his voyage to Tang China where he received a transmission in esoteric Buddhism from Hui-guo.[6] He then returned to Japan to found what has become known as "Heian Buddhism," a Buddhist institution completely independent from the Nara clergy.

However, revisionist Buddhism scholars such as Ryūichi Abe have recently challenged this traditional view of Kūkai.[7] First, Kūkai's disillusion

[3] Kashiwahara Yūsen, Sonoda Kōyu, eds, *Shapers of Japanese Buddhism,* tr. by Gaynor Sekimori (Tokyo: Kōsei Publishing Company, 1994), 39.
[4] Known in Japanese as the Daigaku (大学), the State Confucian College was established by the Taihō Code of 701. The State Confucian College trained students to become bureaucrats (Asao, et. al., 630).
[5] Biographical information on Gonsō appears in the next section. Some texts refer to him as Gonzō.
[6] Throughout this thesis, I will romanize Chinese in the pinyin system. However, some secondary sources I referred to use the Wade-Giles system. I will provide the pinyin equivalents whenever a romanization in Wade-Giles appears.
[7] Ryūichi Abe, *The Weaving of Mantra: Kūkai and the Construction of Esoteric Buddhist Discourse* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 4-5.

with his studies at the State Confucian College and subsequent conversion to Buddhism were probably due just as much to his family's waning political fortunes (which jeopardized his chances of a governmental appointment) as to his dissatisfaction with Confucian doctrine. Second, although Kūkai did introduce esoteric Buddhism to Japan and found the Kongōbuji Temple atop Mt. Kōya, he actually worked within the existing system in order to legitimate his new esoteric Buddhism. Here, "esoteric Buddhism" refers to the branch of Mahayana Buddhism that emphasizes "attaining enlightenment in the present"[8] and understanding Buddhist truths through forming mudra (hand gestures), chanting mantra (mystic phrases), and contemplating mandala (pictorial representations of Buddhist realms). On the other hand, "exoteric Buddhism" relies on plain language as a means of transmitting Buddhist truths. However, rather than denouncing exoteric Buddhism, Kūkai recognized exoteric teachings as provisional forms that allowed the masses to understand Buddhism. The manner in which medieval biographies treated Kūkai clearly shows close ties with the traditional Nara Buddhist establishment.

The modern received image of Kūkai is based on information, some of it factual, some probably not, that has been passed on throughout the centuries. Although it is not possible to recover who Kūkai really was, the manner in which legends about him were transmitted and made to seem plausible at varying points in history is worthy of study. In his study on how Kūkai legends were used to legitimize land holdings, George Tanabe observes:

[8] "Attaining enlightenment in the present" (J: 即身成仏、*sokushin-jōbutsu*) is the esoteric belief that it is possible to escape the cycle of death and rebirth in this lifetime. This differs from the exoteric belief that it takes three *kalpas* (Buddhist eons) to achieve the same result (Nakamura, 521).

> The legends of Kōyasan and Kūkai clearly were concocted to promote institutional purposes of legitimizing land holdings and persuading people to become contributing patrons. If there is any cynicism to be attributed to such an observation, its source must be found in the legend writers themselves. Did they not know that their stories were but fabrications? And if they did know that their claims were but literary creations, how could they have sincerely passed it off as fact, unless they were cynics of the most serious kind? It is not possible, however, to determine the attitudes of these writers to their work, and, rather than seeing them as cynics, we should regard the writers of legends and other miraculous stories as people who truly believe that they are reporting fact and not inventing it. The greater tribute to the mind's imaginative powers lies not in the recognition of its capacity to create stories, in crediting it with powers to affect perception in such a way that the perceiver finds him or herself experiencing something extraordinary, not concocting it deliberately. People really do see ghosts as a matter of fact; they really do experience miracles. It is not just a matter of literature and its genres (legends, myth, *engi*, etc.) but of literary reports of strange happenings. The writers were naive by modern standards, and, as such, can be granted the benefit of being sincere rather than being accused of cynicism.[9]

Tanabe's observations suggest that although legend writers may have believed what they were writing, they certainly recognized the power of legends to legitimize, i.e. to establish someone or something as orthodox and authoritative. Since the term 'legend' can be defined in many ways, I will use Tanabe's definition throughout this study. He defines a legend as:

> ...a factual phantasy, "factual" because it centers around a real person, time, place, or thing as opposed to the indefinite and purely fictional "long ago and far away, there lived an old man and woman" of folk tales. Legends are usually particular and local.[10]

However, before embarking on a critical literary study of Kūkai legends and examining how "plausibility" was created, two methodological issues require explication.

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[9] George J. Tanabe, Jr., "Legends and Legitimacy: The Founding of Mt. Kōya and its Cult" 1992 unpublished article, 29-30. Cited with permission of the author.

[10] Tanabe, ibid., 2.

The first, and perhaps most problematic, issue is whether religious biographies, hagiographies, and popular legends can be treated as "literature." Since "great works" like *Genji Monogatari, Kokinshū,* or Noh dramas are firmly established in the Japanese canon (as it is seen today), no one would dispute that they are works of "literature." However, the question still remains: what exactly is "literature," in the Japanese, Western, or any other sense of the term? Even the most cursory review of Western literary theory reveals that the meaning of the term "literature" has changed considerably over the years. Trevor Ross suggests that the definition of literature evolves as literary criticism evolves, with each school defining literature in its own image.[11] Until the late eighteenth century, literature was viewed in the West as "polite learning, humanistic learning, belles lettres; that which was the source of wide and humane knowledge," as well as "imaginative, creative, artistic, or aesthetically oriented writing." The term "polite learning" clearly indicates that up to the late nineteenth century "literature" was considered a refined endeavor of the upper classes. Therefore, anything produced by the politically, economically, socially, or culturally disenfranchised would not qualify. Also, the phrase "wide and humane knowledge" seems to suggest that at this point in history "literature" was required to have some redeeming aesthetic or didactic value. Naturally, defining "literature" in terms of its "aesthetic," "creative," "artistic," or "didactic" value opens debate on what exactly these terms mean (both diachronically and synchronically) and who has the authority to define them. While late nineteenth and early twentieth century literary historians and critics may have recognized the didactic value of some hagiographies, they would not have considered these texts as

[11] Trevor Ross, *Literature* in Irena R. Makaryk, ed., *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993, 581-582.

"literature" since they were not written to entertain or express literary ideals. However, the problem with defining literature in terms of some relative value is that what is of value and who determines it is always changing. On the other hand, the definitions of "literature" provided by later schools of thought allow non-canonical texts also to be treated as "literature."

Humanist literary history was one of the schools of thought that was interested in examining literature from the standpoint of rhetoric and use of language. The humanist literary historians viewed literature as a form of cultural production distinct from its intellectual rival, historiography.[12] Lee Patterson writes,

> Literary writing is set apart from other kinds because it uses language in a special, self-reflexive way: in Jakobson's terms, literature suppresses the other functions of language, such as the emotive or the referential, in favor of the poetic function, by which he meant the capacity of language to draw attention to itself. This self-reflexivity is accomplished by a variety of means: meter, rhyme, ambiguity, paranomasia, sound symbolism — by, in effect, the whole range of practices classified by rhetoricians as figures of speech. Nor is this self-referentiality confined to poetry, for literary prose also marks itself off from other kinds of writing not primarily by its fictiveness but by its manipulation of the facts. For another of the Russian Formalists, Victor Shklovsky, "the most typical novel in world literature" is the elaborately crafted *Tristram Shandy* because it so pervasively deploys — and lays bare — the rhetorical techniques that control the production of all novels. Put bluntly, formalism defined literature as a kind of writing primarily concerned with neither reference to the world nor communication with an audience but rather with the conventions — or forms — of writing itself. Any account, therefore, that did not place this concern at the center of its attention inevitably

[12] Historiography was seen as the rival of literature because in the late nineteenth century, it claimed to be the only discipline able to objectively provide the "facts" needed to properly contexutalize the text and provide the correct interpretation. The literary historians of the time, drawing on the methods of historiography, claimed they were the only ones "capable of acheiving an objectivity and reliability that other forms of cultural understanding, like literary criticism, could not achieve." Lee Patterson, "Literary History" in Frank Lentricchia, et. al., eds. *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). 250-251.

traduced the very literariness that was its subject.[13]

However, the humanist literary historians were not the only ones interested in examining literature beyond the confines of the canon and traditional interpretation. For example, reader-response theory completely removes the author (as well as authorial intent) from literary analysis, leaving interpretation of the text solely to the reader. In the 1950s, the French literary critic Roland Barthes investigated the "paradoxical relationship that existed in the nineteenth century in France between the development of a concept of Literature (with a capital L) and the growing sense of a breakdown in the representational capacities of language."[14] Barbara Johnson provides the following analysis of Barthes' thought:

> Literature was in some ways being exalted as a substitute religion, but it was a religion whose high priests seemed only to proclaim the obscurity, imperfection, or unreliability of their own medium. The proper names associated with the elaboration of *both* sides of this phenomenon are Flaubert and Mallarmé. These writers, says Barthes, *constructed* the object Literature in the very act of announcing its death. In later essays, Barthes lays out a theory of literature based on a split between the classic notion of a *work (oeuvre)* — considered as a closed, finished, reliable representational *object* — and the modern notion of a *text* — considered as an open, infinite *process* that is both meaning-generating and meaning subverting. "Work" and "text" are thus not two different kinds of objects but two different ways of viewing the written word. What interests Barthes is the *tension* between the concept of Literature and the concept of textuality. Where Literature is seen as a series of discreet and highly meaningful Great Works, textuality is the manifestation of an open-ended, heterogeneous, disruptive force of signification and erasure that transgresses all closure — a force that is operative even within the Great Works themselves.[15]

[13] Patterson, 253.

[14] Barbara Johnson,"Writing," in Frank Lentricchia, et. al., eds., *Critical Terms for Literary Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 40.

[15] Ibid., 40.

Since Barthes saw aspects of "text" (open-endedness, disruption, erasure, etc.) in the "Great Works" of literature, clearly Barthes's definition of "literature" is flexible enough to allow non-canonical works to be considered for literary analysis. Although some may dispute whether hagiography, legends, and religious biography can be considered forms of "literature" equal to the so-called "Great Works," Barthes's view of literature as text allows for the tools of literary analysis (even if they are not necessarily his tools) to be applied to these kinds of religious writings. Manina Jones demonstrates the relevance of applying a textual approach toward literary study:

> In its most limited sense, textuality describes the written condition of the literary object. The term suggests that literature is a material entity constructed from words rather than an abstract concept. However, as part of structuralist and poststructuralist linguistic theory, particularly in relation to the work of Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes, the term marks both a breakdown between literature and other verbal and non-verbal signifying practices, and a subversion of the principle that any text can function as an object whose meaning is coherent and self-contained. Textuality in this context describes the tendency of language to produce not a simple reference to the world 'outside' language but a multiplicity of potentially contradictory signifying events that are activated in the reading process...
>
> A number of what might be broadly called 'worldly' theorists of textuality, among them Michel Foucault and Edward Said, have responded to what they perceive as more linguistically marked inward-looking versions of the concept by making their own theories responsible to the political, historical, and social frames of reference. As these approaches demonstrate, textuality takes in what might more traditionally be seen as the purview os the social sciences. Objects of study such as historical events, institutional practices, or cross-cultural relationships may therefore be seen as systems of signs to be deciphered and interpreted, rather than as realities to be recorded...[16]

Although Barthes's theories of literature allow for religious writings to be studied using the tools of literary analysis, the second methodological issue

[16] Manina Jones, "Textuality" In Irena R. Makaryk, ed., *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 641-642.

is to establish an appropriate mode of analysis. As previously mentioned, the purpose of this study is not to "recover" who Kūkai really was by separating the "historical" Kūkai from the one of legend. Also, this thesis does not intend to make any claims concerning the veracity of these legends. However, it is reasonable to assume that, at least at one time, these legends were written, transmitted, and re-written with the intent of making them seem plausible to the reader or listener. In my opinion, the literary concept most suited to analyzing how plausible narrative is created in religious writings is Gerard Genette's notion of *vraisemblance.*

Vraisemblance refers to the process by which realistic, plausible narrative is created.[17] Although a text may be entirely fictional, a *vraisemblable* narrative contains elements that resonate with the societally conditioned *maxims* (expectations) of the reader, and is both plausible and acceptable. Genette points out in his article "*Vraisemblance* and *Motivation*:"

> A *vraisemblable* narrative is thus a narrative where the actions answer, as so many applications of particular cases, to a body of maxims accepted as true by the public to which the narrative is addressed; but these maxims, due to the very fact that they are accepted, often remain implicit. The relationship between the vraisemblable narrative and the system of vraisemblance to which it is attached is thus essentially silent: generic conventions function as a system of natural forces and constraints, which the narrative follows as if without perceiving and, *a fortiori,* without naming. In the classic Western, for example, the strictest rules of behavior (among other kinds of rule) are applied without ever being explained, because they are themselves absolutely part of the tacit contract between a work and its public.[18]

[17] The closest English approximation for *vraisemblance* is probably "verisimilitude." However, the translator of Genette's article chose to leave the term untranslated.

[18] Gerard Genette, *"Vraisemblance et Motivation," Narrative* vol.9, no. 3 (October 2001). Tr. by David Gorman, 239-258.

Genette identified three categories of narrative: the *vraisemblable* narrative, the motivated narrative, and the arbitrary narrative. Since the *vraisemblable* narrative conforms to the accepted social maxims of the times, it can exist (and be received as plausible) without further elaboration. Genette provides the following selection as an example of a *vraisemblable* narrative: "The Marquise summoned her carriage and went for a ride." Genette considers this an example of *vraisemblable* narrative because it is logical (at least in the mindset of the late 19th century French reader) to assume that one would ride in a vehicle after summoning it. Since this narrative conforms to the maxims of the period, it can exist (and be plausible) without further explanation. However, a motivated narrative requires further elaboration in order to become plausible because the sequence of events it describes is not "logical" to its audience, as in Genette's example "The Marquise summoned her carriage and then went to bed, because she was a capricious person." This narrative is motivated because further elaboration was required to explain why she would go to bed rather than ride her carriage. Finally, Genette presents a third category of narrative — the arbitrary narrative — as that which lacks *vraisemblance* yet is not properly motivated. However, Genette's view is that there is really no difference between the *vraisemblable* and arbitrary narratives; which category a particular narrative belongs to depends on the reader's perceptions.

Kūkai legends were used by a variety of institutions and constituencies (including Kūkai himself) to legitimate themselves. Through his own writings, Kūkai established himself as a Buddhist and a legitimate propagator of esoteric Buddhism. Shortly after his death, Kūkai's disciples produced biographical texts that further cemented and legitimized Kūkai's status and

lineage. Later, the medieval Nara Buddhist establishment (Tōdaiji) and the Rinzai Zen sect incorporated Kūkai's biography into their writings. In the case of Tōdaiji, this was done in an attempt to revive the temple's prestige, which had declined during the medieval period due to the popularity of esoteric and Pure Land Buddhism. The Rinzai sect's goal was to legitimate its new form of Buddhism. This study will apply Genette's theories to Kūkai's autobiographical writings, biographical writings produced shortly after Kūkai's death, and medieval hagiographies, in order to determine how legitimacy was created.

Chapter Two
Kūkai's Autobiographical Writings

Legends have many origins: some are oral retellings that seem to go back to the beginning of time, while others are written down generations, or even centuries, after the alleged events took place. However, the origin of Kūkai's biographies, legends, and hagiographies can be traced to a single point in history and to a single person. The crafting and canonization of the Kūkai legend began with Kūkai himself. In his lifetime, he wrote several texts with autobiographical content that would serve as the baseline for future (particularly the medieval) versions of his biography. Analysis of several of these texts indicates that the purpose of these writings was to legitimate Kūkai as an esoteric Buddhist leader by justifying his conversion to Buddhism, and to provide a legitimate esoteric lineage for himself.

In order for Kūkai to propagate his new esoteric Buddhism in early Heian Japan, when the scholarly Nara State Buddhist establishment still held a dominant position, he needed a lineage that would establish his credentials as a true transmitter of the Dharma. The presence of *vraisemblable* and motivated narratives throughout these autobiographical and biographical writings aids in the creation of a plausible narrative that establishes Kūkai as a legitimate propagator of esoteric Buddhism. This section will examine three early Heian texts that create the foundation for later Kūkai legends, biographies, and hagiographies: the *Sangō Shiki, Shōrai Mokuroku,* and *Goyuigō.*

Kūkai's Fictional Autobiography: The *Sangō Shiki*

In 797, Kūkai wrote the *Sangō Shiki* (三教指帰、*Indications of the Teachings of the Three Goals*),[19] a text that justifies his conversion to Buddhism by showing its superiority over Confucianism and Taoism, the two other dominant intellectual and philosophical traditions of the period.[20] In the *Sangō Shiki,* Kūkai uses the fictional characters Kimō (亀毛, Tortoise Hair), Kyobu (虚亡, Nothingness),[21] and Kamei Kotsuji (假名乞兒, Mendicant X) as representatives of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, respectively. These three representatives are asked by Tokaku (兎角, Hare's Horn) to lecture his wayward nephew Shitsuga (蛭牙, Leech's Tusk) and try to convince him to renounce his life of hunting, gambling, and womanizing.

Several autobiographical details that appear in Kūkai's introduction find their way into later biographies. First, he mentions that he studied the Confucian classics under his maternal uncle, Atō no Ōtari (阿刀大足、dates unknown), who was a noted Confucian scholar and tutor to Prince Iyo (伊予

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[19] The *Sangō Shiki* consists of three fascicles and is written in a very ornate Six Dynasties style of classical Chinese and makes numerous references to Chinese texts, indicating Kūkai's erudition. (Abe, 84). There are several surviving manuscript copies, but all of them were written in either the late Heian or the early Kamakura periods. The version referred to in this thesis is the print version (NKBT) of the Kenchō-bon (建長本) held by the Kōyasan Kongō Sanmai'in (高野山金剛三昧院), which was copied around 1254. The Kenchō-bon seems to originally have been a *hakubun* text with pronunciation and punctuation guides added in red and black ink at some later time. (Shōkō Watanabe, et. al., eds., *Sangō shiki/Shōryōshū* NKBT, v. 71 (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), 24-25, 77).

[20] Although Taoism was banned by the state due to fears that its mystical teachings would undermine the state's Confucian foundations, the Nara period intelligensia were familiar with Taoism's basic texts and teachings.

[21] These spellings for the names of the Confucian and Taoist spokesmen are based on those found in Hakeda's 1972 translation and Abe's 1999 study. However, the NKBT glosses these names as Kibō (きぼう) and Kyobō (きょぼう), which probably reflects the spellings at the time the manuscript was copied.

親王、?-807). Second, although Kūkai does not mention the noted Sanron[22] scholar-monk Gonsō (勤操、754-827)[23] by name, he states that he learned the mantra of the bodhisattva Ākāsagarbha (J: Kokūzō Bosatsu, 虚空蔵菩薩)[24] from a Buddhist monk. Supposedly, reciting the mantra one million times (ten thousand times a day for one hundred days) would allow the practitioner to remember anything he saw or heard. Kūkai writes:

> ...Meanwhile a Buddhist monk showed me a scripture called the *Kokūzō gumonji no hō*. In that work it is stated that if one recites the mantra one million times in the according to the proper method, one will be able to memorize passages and understand the meaning of any scripture. Believing what the Buddha says to be true, I recited the mantra incessantly, as if I were rubbing one piece of wood against another to make fire, all the while earnestly hoping to achieve this result. I climbed up Mount Tairyū in Awa Province and meditated at Cape Muroto in Tosa. The valley reverberated to the sound of my voice as I recited, and the planet Venus appeared in the sky.[25]

Even though the *Sangō Shiki* is supposed to be a debate among Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism to determine which is superior, Kūkai's comments "Believing what the Buddha says to be true..." and elsewhere "My relatives and teachers opposed my entering the priesthood,

[22] The Sanron (三論) sect was one of the scholarly Six Nara Schools (J: 南都六宗、*nanto rokushū*) that focused on Mādhyamika notions of emptiness (Nakamura, 567).
[23] Also known as Gonzō, he was a scholar-monk who studied Sanron teachings under Zengi (善議、729-812). Gonzō was known for his interest in esoteric Buddhism and was in contact with both Kūkai and Tendai (天台) sect founder Saichō (最澄、767-822).
[24] The "Bodhisattva of the Empty Treasury," Ākāsagarbha is the storehouse (蔵、*kura*) of infinite wisdom (S: *prajna* J: 智慧、*chie*) and effort (S: *guna* J: 功徳、*kudoku*). Ākāsagarba is manifested as the planet Venus (Nakamura, 264). Ākāsagarba is also revered for his wish-granting powers and often appears holding a wish-granting gem (S: *cintāmani* J: 如意法珠、*nyo'i-hōshu*). He also appears with a flaming sword, which represents his wisdom (Sawa Ryūken, ed., *Mikkyō jiten* (Kyoto: Hōzōkan, 1975), 205, 546).
[25] Hakeda, 102.

saying that by doing so I would be unable to fulfill the Five Cardinal Virtues[26] or to accomplish the duties of loyalty and filial piety..." foreshadow the text's ultimate conclusion.

The first way Kūkai creates plausible narrative is through his choice of diction. As mentioned earlier, the *Sangō Shiki* is written in the very ornate Six Dynasties style of classical Chinese, and the numerous references and allusions to classical texts, historical events, and famous people in the Chinese tradition reveal the depth of his learning. Kūkai's short introduction alone is rich with references to the Chinese classics: first, he compares his inspiration for writing the *Sangō Shiki* with that of the authors of the *Eight Trigrams,*[27] the *Tao Te Ching,*[28] the *Book of Odes,*[29] and the *Elegies of Ch'u.*[30] The authors of these classics were moved to write their respective masterpieces because they were "inspired from within," and although Kūkai considers himself "an ordinary man," he feels "compelled to express his innermost feelings."[31] Despite Kūkai's humble description of himself as "ordinary," it is clear that he wants the *Sangō Shiki* to be received in the same manner as the "great" texts he listed. Kūkai also compares the intensity of his

[26] The Five Cardinal Virtues (五常、C: *wu-chang* J: *gojō*) of Confucianism are benevolence (仁、C: *jen* J: *jin*), righteousness (義、C: *yi* J: *gi*), propriety (礼、C: *li* J: *rei*), wisdom (智、C: *zhi* J: *chi*), and sincerity (C: *xin* J: *shin*) (Hakeda, 102, Watanabe, et. al., 85).
[27] Divination trigrams drawn by Fu xi (伏犧、J: Fugi) .
[28] The Taoist classic written by Lao zi (老子、J: Rōshi). In the *Sangō Shiki,* Kūkai refers to it as the *Dān pian* (聃篇、J: *Tampen).* Dān was Lao zi's given name, so this title literally means, "The Writings of Dān."
[29] Known in Chinese as the *Zhōu Shī* (周詩、J: *Shū Shi*), the *Book of Odes* is one of the five core texts (五経、C: *wu jing* J: *gokyō*) of the Chinese classics and is the oldest collection of Chinese poetry.
[30] Known in Chinese as the *Chū cī* (楚辞、J: *Soji*), it is a seventeen fascicle collection of Chinese poetry compiled over five centuries. Compilation started during the Warring States period (403-221 BC) by Qū Yuan (屈原、343(?)-277 BC) and continued until its completion in the second century CE.
[31] Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 102.

studies to that of the poor Chinese boy whose only source of light by which to study was the glare from snow and the flickering of fireflies, and to that of the student who tied a rope around his neck and tied it to a beam to keep himself from falling asleep.[32] It appears that Kūkai's writings were quite well received by the establishment: significant portions of the Sangō Shiki's introduction appear verbatim in later texts such as the *Shoku Nihon Kōki*.[33]

In the section where Kimō argues in favor of Confucianism, he uses stories found in the Nine Classics,[34] the Three Dynastic Histories,[35] and the Confucian *Analects*. A product of early Heian Confucian education, Kūkai knew that literary Chinese was the privileged mode of literary expression and that Confucian texts were held in high regard and widely read by the Japanese court. By framing his arguments using Six Dynasties rhetoric and making frequent references to classical Chinese sources, Kūkai created a *vraisemblable* narrative that resonated with the literary expectations of his audience. While Genette's original writings on *vraisemblance* were limited to the actual language used by the author, I believe that the concept of *vraisemblance* can

[32] Kūkai is referring to a Chinese story that is well-known in Japan to this very day as the phrase *keisetsu no kō* (蛍雪の功). The source of this story is the *Mēng Qiu* (蒙求、J: *Mōgyū*), a collection of biographies compiled by Li Han (李翰、J: Rikan). Compilation was completed in 746. The second story appears in the *Sheng xian chuan* (先賢伝、J: *Senkenden*).

[33] The *Shoku Nihon Kōki* (続日本後紀) is an imperially commissioned history that was compiled by Fujiwara-no-Yoshifusa (藤原良房、807-872).

[34] The Nine Classics (九経、C: *Jiū Jing*, J: *Kyūkei*) are *The Book of Changes* (易経、C: *Yī Jing*, J: *Ekikyō*), *The Book of History* (書経、C: *Shū Jing*, J: *Shokyō*), *The Book of Odes* (see note on previous page), *The Book of Rites* (礼記、C: *Li Ji*, J: *Raiki*), *The Rites of Chou* (周礼、C: *Zhōu Li*, J: *Shurai*), *The Book of Ritual* (儀礼、C: *Yi Li*, J: *Girai*), the *Chūn qiū zuo shi chuan* (春秋左氏伝、J: *Shunjūsashiden*), the *Chūn qiū gōng yang chuan* (春秋公羊伝、J: *Shunjūkōyōden*), and the *Chūn qiū gu liang chuan* (春秋穀梁伝、J: *Shunjūkokuryōden*). All of these texts were required reading at the State Confucian College.

[35] The Three Dynastic Histories (三史、C: *Sān Shī* J: *Sanshi*) consist of the *Historical Records* (史記、C: *Shī Ji*, J: *Shiki*) of Si-ma qiān (司馬遷、J: Shibasen, 145-117 BC), the *History of the Former Han* (漢書、C: *Han Shū*, J: *Kanjo*), by Pan Ku (班固、J: Hanko, 32-92) and the *History of the Later Han* (後漢書、C: *Hou Han Shū* J: *Gokanjo*) by Fan Yeh (范曄、J: Han'yō, 398-445).

be expanded to include rhetoric as well, since presentation is just as important as content in creating plausible narrative.

However, although it is somewhat ironic that Kūkai uses the literary tools of the system he is denouncing to make his arguments, it is strategically necessary. Through his learned discussion of Confucianism and Taoism, Kūkai establishes himself as knowledgeable of the period's dominant discourses, which in turn makes his arguments against these discourses in favor of Buddhism more difficult to dismiss and makes his conversion to Buddhism all the more justified. Another noteworthy point is that although Kūkai makes liberal use of his Confucian and classical Chinese knowledge to elucidate his points in the *Sangō Shiki,* later versions of his biography only make passing reference to his Confucian studies.[36]

Although Kūkai makes an impressive demonstration of his textual knowledge in the Confucianism section of the *Sangō Shiki,* he reserves his best material for the Buddhism section. The major difference between the Buddhism section and the earlier ones is that Kūkai presents original rhymed prose and poetry in order to illustrate his points. In the Confucian and Taoist sections, Kimō and Kyobu rely solely on the content of canonical texts and historical events to present their case. Perhaps Kūkai chose rhymed prose as the medium by which to present his views on Buddhism because he knew that the study of poetry was gaining in popularity at the State Confucian College. Kūkai was a student of the Confucian classics (明経道、Meikeidō), so his official studies were devoted to the texts he mentioned in the introduction. However, the study of history (紀伝道、Kidendō) was gaining popularity at the college because history students learned how to write poetry

[36] The significance of this tendency will be discussed in the section dealing with medieval biographies and hagiographies.

and prose in Chinese, an important skill for an early Heian bureaucrat. Although Kūkai's official training was in the Confucian classics, he does refer to a wide range of Buddhist sources in the final section. On Kūkai's use of Buddhist sources, Abe writes:

> Katsumata Shunkyō, in his annotated edition of *Demonstrating the Goals,* has identified forty Buddhist canonical texts that Kūkai quotes, or to which he makes specific reference, in the third fascicle. Among them are twenty-eight sūtras, including major Mahāyana texts — such as the *Lotus,* the *Golden Light,* the *Avatamsaka,* the *Vimalakīrti,* the *Vajracchedikā,* the *Mahāparinirvāna,* the *Srīmālādevī,* the *Lankāvatāra,* and the *Sūrangama* — and many *Āgama* texts, in particular the *Dīgha-nikāya* and the *Majjima-nikāya.* Other works cited include such principal treatises such as the *Abhidharmakosa,* the *Vijnaptimātra-tāsiddhi,* the *Discourse on the Greater Prajnā-pāramitā* (Ch. *Ta-chih-tu-lun;* Jpn: *Daichidoron*), and the *Awakening of Faith* (*Ta-ch'eng ch'i-hsin-lun;* Jpn. *Daijō kishinron*).
> These citations show that within a few years after his disillusionment with his studies at the State College, Kūkai had already read widely in the literature of Buddhist scriptures and doctrinal texts. Kūkai devoted his life as an *ubasoku* [a lay practitioner] not only to asceticism in the mountains and forests but also to intensive textual studies. To attain the erudition in Buddhist literature exhibited in Kamei's argument, Kūkai must have had access to major Buddhist libraries, most likely at large Buddhist temples in Nara...[37]

While Kamei Kotsuji's arguments in favor of Buddhism are also replete with Chinese historical and literary references, it is his inclusion of original rhymed poetry and prose that distinguishes this section from the earlier ones. The rhetorical pattern employed by Kamei Kotsuji is to first explain his argument using standard prose, then to summarize his points through rhymed prose or poetry. At the beginning of the section, Kamei Kotsuji uses poetry to explain his reasons for not seeking fame and fortune in the mundane world:

> Even if I wish to plow, I lack the physical strength;
> In seeking for a master, I lack the wit of Ning.

[37] Abe, 95.

If lacking talent I assume a job, then I insult the office;
If I get a stipend without virtue, I do harm.
To be paid for blowing the flute when I do not know how to play is not right;
Only in Chou[38] indeed were proper music and teaching known.
Even Confucius, while seeking employment, spent no peaceful days;
What rule should such an ignorant person as I follow?
The desire to advance is hampered by a lack of talent,
Yet retreat is made an impossible circumstance.
So caught between advancing and retreating,
What else can I do but lament?[39]

Once again, Kūkai shows his familiarity with the Chinese classics through his reference to Ning-qi, who obtained a government appointment by beating the horns of an ox and singing in front of Marquis Huai.[40] Actually, the Kamei Kotsuji passage is the second time Kūkai makes reference to Ning-qi; the first reference was made in Kimō's section on Confucianism. Another reference to the Chinese tradition is found in the phrase "To be paid for blowing the flute when I do not know how to play is not right..." This refers to the story where all seven hundred of King Xuan's court flutists fled when individual flutists were asked to do a solo performance.[41] Kūkai's two unannotated references to Ning-qi, as well as his alluding to the King Xuan story without any direct reference to the king himself, show how deeply entrenched the Chinese classics were in the Japanese intellectual discourse.

At the end of the section, Kamei Kotsuji recites a poem for his audience that summarizes the points he made and provides a closing argument for renouncing court life in favor of Buddhism:

The light of the sun and moon breaks through darkness,

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[38] Zhou in pinyin.
[39] Hakeda,125.
[40] Ibid., 111.
[41] Ibid., 111.

And the three teachings[42] illuminate ignorance.
Nature and desire vary from person to person,
Treatment differs with each physician.
Human duties were preached by Confucius;
On learning them one becomes a high government official.
Lao Tzu[43] taught the creation by yin and yang;
On receiving his instructions one can observe the world from the tower of a Taoist temple.
More significant and profound is the teaching of the ultimate path of Mahayana.
It teaches the salvation of oneself and others;
It does not even exclude animals or birds.
The flowers in the spring fall beneath the branches;
Dew in autumn vanishes before the withered grass.
Flowing water can never be stopped;
Whirling winds howl constantly.
The world of senses is a sea in which one may well drown;
Eternity, Bliss, the Self, and Purity are the summits on which we ultimately belong.
I know the fetters that bind me in the triple world;[44]
Why should I not give up the thought of serving the court?[45]

In terms of rhetorical technique, Kamei Kotsuji's narrative style is remarkably similar to that of a sutra. For example, the majority of the chapters in the *Lotus Sutra* contain *gatha* poems that summarize or further explicate the teachings expounded in the intial prose section, and most of the chapters end with a *gatha.* In the case of the *Lotus Sutra,* it is believed that the poetry sections were composed around 100 B.C. and the prose sections were written around 40-50 A.D. Indeed, it is believed that for all sutras, the gathas were written first. The sutras were originally transmitted orally, and they were

[42] Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.

[43] Lao-xi in pinyin.

[44] The triple world (J: 三界、 *sankai*) refers to the realms of desire, form, and formlessness (Nakamura, 309).

[45] Hakeda, 139.

undoubtedly easier to memorize it as poetry rather than prose.[46] In the *Sangō Shiki,* Kamei Kotsuji first introduces his arguments using prose, then summarizes using rhymed verse or rhymed prose. Since Kūkai appeared to be well read in the sutras even before going to China, he certainly would have noticed the use of gathas in the sutras. Also, since the study of Chinese poetry was gaining popularity at the State Confucian College, Kūkai may have also viewed poetry as a means to make his Buddhist beliefs more presentable and impressive to his audience.

Although the *Sangō Shiki* is written in a quasi-fictional format and is not autobiographical *per se,* it is clear from Kūkai's introduction and the content of the fictional dialog that his purpose is to explain his renunciation of Confucianism (which he studied for many years under his maternal uncle and at the State Confucian College) and to justify his conversion to Buddhism. Also, similarities between the fictional Kamei Kotsuji and Kūkai, such as their age (both were 24), place of origin (Tado County, Sanuki Province, on the island of Shikoku),[47] the ascetic manner in which they practiced Buddhism (living amongst nature, climbing mountains, and roaming about), and the disapproval both received from their relatives for taking the Buddhist path suggest that Kūkai used Kamei Kotsuji to narrate his own experiences.

[46] Shioiri Ryōdō, "The Meaning of the Formation and Structure of the Lotus Sutra," in George J. Tanabe Jr., et. al., eds., *The Lotus Sutra in Japanese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 33.

[47] When Kamei Kotsuji enters the discussion, Kyobu inquires about his origins. After a long preface on how one cannot have permanent residence in this fleeting world, he says that he is living his "mirage-like life by the bay where camphor trees shade the sun's rays, on the island adorned by shining seaweed...," which Kūkai states in a notation is a reference to his place of birth (Abe, 89). However, considering that the oldest extant copies of the *Sangō Shiki* date back to the late Heian period (almost three centuries after Kūkai's death), there is the possibility that these "notations by Kūkai" (the NKBT commentators use the term *jichū,* 自注) are really additions by later copyists in an attempt to strenghten an autobiographical reading of the text.

The Esoteric Tradition Begins: Kūkai's Ordination in the *Shōrai Mokuroku*

The *Sangō Shiki* is well-known as Kūkai's written justification for his conversion to Buddhism, but the Buddhist discourse he presents is largely exoteric. Although some Buddhism scholars have tried to claim that Kūkai's instruction in the *Kokūzō Gumonjihō* by Gonsō also served as his formal introduction into esoteric Buddhist practice, the absence of references to esoteric texts and practices in the *Sangō Shiki* makes this unlikely. Undoubtedly, the Nara Buddhist establishment was aware of esoteric texts and practices to a certain degree, but esoteric Buddhism did not exist as a unified, rational system in Japan until Kūkai returned from China. Therefore, while the *Sangō Shiki* established and legitimized Kūkai as a Buddhist, he needed something that would legitimize himself as a transmitter of esoteric Buddhism. He accomplished this by writing an autobiographical passage describing his ordination as an esoteric Buddhist in the *Shōrai Mokuroku.*

For the most part, the *Shōrai Mokuroku* (請来目録) is a catalog of the sutras and ritual implements Kūkai brought back from China. However, it is an important text because it contains an autobiographical narrative of Kūkai's first encounter with Master Hui-guo (恵果、J: Keika, 746-805). The abbot of the East Pagoda Hall of the Qing-long-si temple (青竜寺東塔院、J: Shōryōji Tōtōin), Hui-guo was Kūkai's esoteric Buddhist master during the last part of his stay in Chang-an. While the *Sangō Shiki* can be classified as a *vraisemblable* narrative because its rhetoric and content resonate with the expectations of its readership, the *Shōrai Mokuroku* is definitely a motivated narrative. Since the text's intended audience (the Emperor and court officials) was not versed in esoteric Buddhism, its masters, or its history, Kūkai must

play a more intrusive role throughout the narrative to make it seem plausible.

Before Kūkai describes the particulars of his ordination and subsequent training, he gives a short description of Master Hui-guo's lineage. He writes:

> One day, while calling on the eminent Buddhist teachers of the capital, I happened to meet the abbot of the East Pagoda Hall of the Ch'ing-lung Temple, whose Buddhist name was the Acharaya Hui-kuo.[48] This great priest was the disciple chosen to transmit the Dharma from the Tripitaka Master of Broad Wisdom (Pu-k'ung) of the Ta-hsing-shan Temple.[49] His virtue aroused the reverence of his age; his teachings were lofty enough to guide emperors. Three sovereigns who revered him were initiated by receiving abhiseka. The four classes of believers looked up to him for instruction in the Esoteric Buddhist teachings.[50]

The narrative style in this short passage is clearly different from that of the *Sangō Shiki.* Since the intended readers of the *Sangō Shiki* were probably graduates of the State Confucian College and ranking bureaucrats, Kūkai was able to make references, direct and indirect, to classical Chinese texts, historical figures, and events with little or no qualification. However, when Kūkai narrates his experiences in China, he needs to provide the reader with much more background information to make it plausible. While Kūkai liberally peppered the *Sangō Shiki* with dozens of famous Chinese historical figures with almost no explanation, he provides a detailed description of Hui-guo's lineage and accomplishments in the *Shōrai Mokuroku.* Kūkai describes Hui-guo as a "great teacher" (大徳、J: *daitoku*), and by stating that Hui-kuo's teachings were "lofty enough to guide emperors" and that three emperors had received *abhiseka,* Kūkai establishes a historical precedent for the use of

[48] Ching-lung ssu and Hui-kuo are the Wade-Giles equivalents of Qing-long-si and Hui-guo, respectively.
[49] Pu-k'ung and Ta-hsing-shan are the Wade-Giles equivalents of Bu kōng and Da xing shan, respectively.
[50] Hakeda, 147.

esoteric Buddhism as a practical technology that can benefit the management of the state. Also, Kūkai's description of Hui-guo's master provides another example of a motivated narrative. Hui-kuo studied under the Indian esoteric master Amoghavajra, known in Chinese as Bu kōng (不空、J: Fukū). However, instead of using his common Chinese name, Kūkai refers to Amoghavajra by his full title, Grand Tripitaka Master of Great Wisdom (大広智三蔵、C: Da guang zhi san cang, J: Daikōchisanzō). Kūkai's use of this full title can be interpreted as an attempt to ensure that the readers of the *Shōrai Mokuroku* are fully aware of Amoghavajra's, and by extension Hui-guo's, importance. Finally, Kūkai's statement "The four classes of believers looked up to him for instruction in the Esoteric Buddhist teachings" implies that esoteric Buddhism was accepted and practiced by the common people as well.[51] These motivated narratives show the Emperor and the Japanese court (the intended audience of the text) that esoteric Buddhism was accepted throughout Chinese society and served a practical purpose.

Once Kūkai established Hui-guo's credentials as an esoteric Buddhist master, he describes their first meeting:

> I called on the abbot in the company of five or six monks from the Hsi-ming Temple.[52] As soon as he saw me he smiled and said, "I knew that you would come! I have waited such a long time. What pleasure it gives me to look upon you today at last! My life is drawing to an end, and until you came there was no one to whom I could transmit the teachings....[53]

Here, Kūkai justifies his selection as Hui-guo's dharma heir. Although the traditional interpretation is that Hui-guo had some kind of extrasensory

[51] The four categories of believers are: priests, nuns, unordained lay priests, and unordained lay nuns (Nakamura, 351).
[52] Xi Ming in pinyin.
[53] Hakeda, 147.

vision that foresaw Kūkai's arrival, Takagi Shingen, an expert on Kūkai biographies, suggests that it is more likely that Hui-guo's advance knowledge of Kūkai was through more earthly means.[54] Hui-guo probably heard of Kūkai from Yi-zhi (義智、J: Gichi), his disciple and resident priest at the Li-quan-si (醴泉寺、J: Reisenji) Temple in Chang-an. Abe confirms Takagi's speculations, pointing out that through connections in the Chang-an Buddhist community Hui-guo would have known of Kūkai's arrival, his remarkable progress in his Sanskrit studies, and his interest in esoteric Buddhist scripture, particularly the *Mahāvairocana Sūtra*.[55] Nevertheless, medieval Kūkai biographers chose to interpret this passage to mean that Hui-guo and Kūkai first encounter was due to karmic destiny, thus further legitimizing Kūkai as the true recepient of Hui-guo's teachings and a true transmitter of esoteric Buddhism.

Kūkai's description of his ordination ceremony and subsequent training further establishes him as Hui-guo's Dharma heir. Kūkai describes the unexpected outcome of his ordination and Hui-guo's delight:

> "Go without delay to the altar of *abhiseka* with incense and a flower."[56] I returned to the temple where I was staying and got the things which were necessary for the ceremony. It was early in the sixth month then that I entered the altar of abhiseka for primary initiation. I stood before the Matrix Mandala and cast my flower in the prescribed manner. By chance it fell on the Body of Mahāvairocana Tathagata in the center. The master exclaimed in delight, "How amazing! How perfectly amazing!" He repeated this three or four times in joy and wonder. I was then given the fivefold abhiseka and received instruction in the grace (kaji) of the Three Mysteries.[57] Next I was taught the Sanskrit

[54] Takaki Shingen, *Kūkai: Shōgai to sono shūhen* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1997),71.
[55] Abe, 120-121.
[56] *Abhiseka* (J: 灌頂、 *kanjō*) is the esoteric Buddhist ritual of ordination (Nakamura, 144).
[57] *Kaji* (加持、 S: adhisthāna) refers to rituals where the practitioner and Buddhas become one through practicing the Three Mysteries (forming *mudra*, reciting *mantra*, and contemplating *mandala*) (Nakamura, 117).

> formulas and ritual manuals for the Matrix Realm and learned the yogic practices which used various sacred objects of concentration to gain transcendental insight.[58]

The purpose of this ritual is to identify which Buddha or bodhisattva the practitioner will follow as his personal deity. Hui-guo was delighted that Kūkai's flower landed in the center of the mandala because Mahāvairocana, the Great Sun Buddha, is the primary object of worship for esoteric Buddhists. Naturally, Kūkai's ordination flower falling on esoteric Buddhism's central deity, coupled with the delight of a priest that had the patronage of the Chinese court, would have enhanced Kūkai's legitimacy in the eyes of his Japanese readership. While his description of his initiation into the Matrix Mandala establishes Kūkai as an exceptional student, his description of his intiation into the Womb Mandala shows him to be a prodigy unlike any other disciple of Hui-guo:

> One day the abbot said to me, "Long ago, when I was still young, I met the great master Amoghavajra. From the first moment he saw me he treated me like a son, and on his visit to the court and his return to the temple I was as inseparable from him as his shadow. He confided to me, "You will be the receptacle of the esoteric teachings. Do your best! Do your best!" I was then initiated into the teachings of both the Womb and Diamond, and into the secret gestures as well. The rest of his disciples, monks and laity alike just studied one of the Mandalas, or one Honored One, or one ritual, but not all of them as I did. How deeply I am indebted to him I shall never be able to express.[59]

Here, Kūkai makes it clear that he received the whole of Hui-guo's teachings, unlike the others. Also, although Kūkai received funding from the Japanese court to study in China for twenty years, he spent his allotted stipend in only two, and only six months of those two years were spent studying under Hui-kuo. Therefore, Kūkai probably also used these descriptive, motivated

[58] Hakeda, 147.

[59] Ibid, 147.

narratives to show his Japanese patrons that his time in China was productive and worth the expense. Texts produced by Hui-guo's Chinese followers confirm Kūkai's talents. In 806, Wu-yin (呉慇), a lay disciple, wrote in his biography of Hui-guo:

> Because he (Kūkai) came to seek the sacred teaching, I [Hui-guo] have granted the secret mandala rituals and the mudrās of the two mandalas to him. Whether in Chinese or Sanskrit, he absorbed all the instructions in my mind. It was just like pouring water from one vase into another....[60]

Hui-guo makes similar statements in Kūkai's conclusion to the *Shōrai Mokuroku* passage:

> "When you first arrived, I feared I did not have enough time left to teach you everything, but now I have completed teaching you, and the work of copying the sutras and making the images has also been finished. Hasten back to your country, offer these things to the court, and spread the teachings throughout the country to increase the happiness of the people. Then the land will know peace, and people everywhere will be content. In that way, you will return thanks to the Buddha and to your teacher. This is also the way to show your devotion to your country and family. My disciple I-ming[61] will carry on the teachings here. Your task is to transmit them to the Eastern Land. Do your best! Do your best!" These were his final instructions to me, kind and patient as always. On the night of the full moon, in the twelfth month of the past year, he purified himself in a ritual bath, and lying on his right side and making the mudra of Mahāvairocana, he breathed his last.
>
> That night, while I sat in meditation in the Hall, the abbot appeared to me in his usual form and said, "You and I have long been pledged to propagate the Esoteric Buddhist teachings. If I am reborn in Japan, this time I will be your disciple."[62]

Kūkai's inclusion of the phrase "Do your best! Do your best!" echoes what Amoghavajra told Hui-guo years before, suggesting that Kūkai enjoyed

[60] Abe, 126.

[61] Yi-ming in pinyin.

[62] Hakeda, 149.

the same kind of preferential relationship with Hui-guo that Hui-guo had with Amogavajra. Earlier, Kūkai wrote that Hui-guo once said that when he was young, Amogavajra treated him like a son and predicted that Hui-guo would be the receptacle of the esoteric teachings.[63] The similarity between Kūkai's descriptions of his relationship with Hui-guo and Hui-guo's relationship with Amogavajra helps to create the lineage and credentials needed to establish esoteric Buddhism in Japan.

Attaining Reinterpretation In This Lifetime: Kūkai's Will

It is clear from analyzing the content of the *Sangō Shiki* and *Shōrai Mokuroku* that Kūkai himself had a hand in the creation of his own legend. In contrast, Kūkai's will (J: *Goyuigō*, 御遺告), which he wrote shortly before his death in 835, is the first in a series of texts that attempt to rewrite Kūkai's biography.

In the introduction to the *Sangō Shiki,* Kūkai describes his Confucian education under his maternal uncle, stating that he was not exposed to Buddhism before his student days at the State Confucian College. However, Kūkai tells a different story in the *Goyuigō:*

> A long time ago, when I was five or six years old and in my parents' home, I had a dream where I was seated on a eight-petaled lotus and conversing with the various Buddhas. However, I did not tell my parents or anyone else about this dream. My parents had a great deal of affection for me and named me Tōtomono (Precious Thing). When I turned twelve, my mother said, "Our child surely was a disciple of the Buddha a long time ago. I know this because in a dream I saw a monk came from India and enter my womb, I became pregnant, and gave birth to this child. That is why this child surely must be a disciple of the Buddha." When my young heart heard this I was overjoyed and always built images of the Buddha out of mud. I built a small shrine near my

[63] Hakeda, 148.

house to house the images and worshiped them.[64]

This autobiographical narrative of Kūkai's youth is quite different from that found in the introduction to the *Sangō Shiki*. First, he claims in his will that he was a Buddhist from a very early age rather than from early adulthood. Also, the miraculous circumstances surrounding his birth parallel those of Shakamuni Buddha, whose mother was also supposedly impregnated in a dream. Shakamuni's birth narrative appears in the *Buddha-carita*, a biography of Shakamuni written by the Indian monk Asvaghosha in the second century CE. Although the original text was written in Sanskrit, it was later translated into Tibetan and Chinese. The *Buddha-carita* describes how Shakamuni's mother was impregnated in the following manner:

> ...Then falling from the host of beings in the Tushita heaven, and illuminating the three worlds, the most excellent of Bodhisattvas suddenly entered at a thought into her womb, like the Nāga-king entereing the cave of Nandā.
>
> Assuming the form of a huge elephant white like Himālaya, armed with six tusks, his face perfumed with flowing ichor, he entered the womb of the queen of king Suddhodana, to destroy the evils of the world.[65]

Kūkai's reference to dreams creates a *vraisemblable* narrative because dreams were often used in Buddhist discourse as a means of conveying truths, revealing the future, or giving the dreamer a glimpse into past lives. This tradition dates back to the historical Buddha. For example, on the eve of his enlightment and transformation into the Buddha, Prince Siddhārtha had five symbolic dreams.[66] On the importance of dreams and visions in

[64] KZ, 2: 38-39.

[65] Asvaghosa, *Buddha-karita*, tr. by Edward B. Cowell (New Delhi : Cosmo Publications, 1977), 4.

[66] George J. Tanabe, Jr. *Myōe the Dreamkeeper: Fantasy and Knowledge in Early Kamakura Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 20.

Mahāyana Buddhism, Tanabe writes:

> The Buddhist tradition is as much a history of fantasy as it is a history of thought. It should be studied as such in order to gain a better understanding of Buddhism as a fantastic philosophy, but of Buddhists and sentient beings as well. The importance of doing this kind of history is suggested by Jacques Le Goff and his proposal for "a new kind of history, the history of imagination": "All mental images are important, not just the iconographic and artistic. The images of interest to the historian are collective images as they are shaped, changed, and transformed by the vicissitudes of history. They are expressed in words and themes. they are bequeathed in traditions, borrowed from one civilization by another, and circulated among the various classes and societies of man." Buddhism in Asia is a treasure trove of images, particularly of visions produced by fantasy, the primary faculty involved in that most important of Buddhist practices, meditation.[67]

Although Tanabe was writing about dreams and fantasies in Kamakura Buddhist writings, the same views toward dreams can be applied to early Heian writings as well. Dreams and visions were an important part of Kegon Buddhism, which was one of the six sects of Nara Buddhism. Since Kūkai was part of the Nara state Buddhist system, he was undoubtedly familiar with the teachings of the Kegon sect. On the relationship between the Kegon sect and dreams, Tanabe writes:

> The *Hua-yen ching*[68] *(Avatamsaka-sūtra)*, the central text of the Kegon School, is known mostly as the inspiration for a great deal of abstruse dogmatics; [but] it must also be remembered...that it is primarily an account of fabulous visions backed by an ancient legacy of visions going back to Sakyamuni himself.[69]

Kūkai was not the first eminent Buddhist that the Japanese hagiographic tradition said to be conceived in a dream. According to legend, Shōtoku Taishi (574-622), the prince who spread Buddhism during the Asuka period, was also conceived when an Indian monk entered his mother's womb

[67]Ibid, 9.

[68] *Hua-yan jing* in pinyin.

[69] Tanabe, *Myōe*, 11.

in a dream. The legends surrounding Shōtoku Taishi's conception and birth are recorded in hagiography collections such as the *Genkō Shakusho*[70] and *setsuwa* collections such as the *Konjaku Monogatarishū.*[71] The *Genkō Shakusho* describes Shōtoku Taishi's conception in the following manner:

> Shōtoku Taishi is the first son of Emperor Yōmei. In a dream, a golden *bhiksu* said to his mother, the Empress, "I have pledged to save others. I would like to entrust my pledge to your womb." The Empress asked, "Who are you?" He said, "I am the bodhisattva who saves others..."[72]

After giving a revised autobiographical narrative of his early childhood, Kūkai again describes his Confucian studies and admission to the State Confucian College, but this time with a Buddhist spin:

> My maternal uncle, Ato-no-Ōtari, said "Even if you are to become a Buddha, nonetheless you should attend the State College, read academic texts, and rise up in the world." Following my uncle's learned advice, I read worldly texts and learned how to write in Chinese. When I was fifteen, I went to the capital, where I met Priest Superintendent Gonsō of Iwabuchidera. From him, I received the teachings of Ākāsagarbha,which I held in my heart. Later, I entered the State Confucian College, where I read the writings of Mencius, the *Zuo zhuan,* and the other classics under the tutelage of Assistant Professor Umasake no Kiyonari and Professor Okada. Although I read a great deal of the classics, I desired Buddhist texts. I often thought that the worldly texts were useless and became ineffective after their authors' death. The teachings of these texts[73] do not surpass worshiping the True Blessed Field.[74]

Here, the events leading to Kūkai's discovery of Buddhism are presented in a

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[70] Refer to the section of this thesis entitled "Medieval Appropriations of Kūkai" (p. 50) for more information on this text.

[71] The *Konjaku Monogatarishū* (今昔物語集) is the largest of the Japanese *setsuwa* collections and was compiled around the mid-twelfth century (Nakamura, 292).

[72] KSTK 31: 215. The phrase "I am the bodhisattva who saves others" is a reference to Kannon (Nakamura, 208).

[73] Confucian texts.

[74] KZ 2: 38-39. The "blessed field" (J:福田、*fukuden* S: *punyaksetgra)* is a metaphor for the Buddha's teachings: the believer reaps merit as a result of planting the seeds of good deeds. (Nakamura, 687).

significantly different order. In the *Sangō Shiki*, Kūkai stated that he encountered Buddhism after studying under his uncle and attending the State Confucian College. Also, he made no mention of any childhood leanings toward Buddhism nor of his uncle telling him to attend the State Confucian College. Indeed, there does not seem to be any evidence that Kūkai had significant contact with Buddhism in his early years; his reason for attending the State Confucian College was to become part of the Nara bureaucracy. The above passage, in addition to the one describing his childhood, are clearly an attempt to distance himself from his Confucian origins and establish himself as a Buddhist from the start.

In the next section, Kūkai describes his early Buddhist training under Gonsō and his quest for the true Dharma. Once again, Kūkai uses dreams as a means of creating a *vraisemblable* narrative:

> ...At this time, I pledged before the Buddha, "When I attempted to seek the true essence of the teachings in accordance with the Dharma, I harbored doubt in my heart regarding the Three Vehicles, the Five Vehicles, and the *Twelve Part Sutra*, and have yet to choose one. What I ask of the Buddhas of the Ten Directions in the Three Worlds is to show me the one true way. "When I prayed with all my heart, someone appeared in my dream and told me "There is a sutra here called the *Mahāvairocana Sutra*. This is what you seek." I was elated to hear this, and sought out this king of the sutras. It was located below the Eastern Stupa of the Kume Temple, in Takechi County, Yamato Province...[75]

This is an example of dreams being used in Buddhist discourse as a means of conveying truth. The solution to Kūkai's doubts about exoteric Buddhism was presented in a dream, where he was instructed to seek the *Mahāvairocana Sutra*, an esoteric scripture. Thus far, Kūkai has used dreams to legitimize his birth as a Buddhist, his interest in Buddhism from a young age, and later, his quest for esoteric Buddhism.

[75] KZ 2: 40-41.

Finally, Kūkai uses dreams as a means to legitimate himself as the true transmitter of Hui-guo's teachings. After Kūkai narrates the extraordinary circumstances surrounding his ordination and training, he describes an incident that happened while he was in Chang-an:

> Zhēn-he, of the Yu tang-si temple and disciple of Shun-xiao, who was one of the Ten Mediation Masters at Court and disciple of Hui-guo, said in vigorous protest, "Although this learned Japanese priest may be a saint, he is not of our school, and should first be taught the basic teachings. Why is it that from the beginning that he received the esoteric teachings?" That night, Zhēn-he was chastised in a dream, and early the next morning he came before me, prostrated himself, and apologized for his misdeeds.[76]

This incident becomes an integral part of the Kūkai legend tradition and appears in medieval hagiographies, as well as illustrated manuscripts. Regardless of whether this altercation actually took place, it serves an important function in the Kūkai tradition: it explains to the Japanese why an eminent Chinese court priest elected to designate a foreigner as his primary disciple and transmit all of his knowledge of esoteric Buddhism to him, an otherwise implausible scenario. Although students from as far away as Java and Central Asia came to Chang-an to study under Hui-guo, none of them received all of his teachings. Such a justification was necessary, after all, as there were undoubtedly a number of qualified Chinese disciples who expected to be named lead disciple. Once again, Kūkai uses dreams as the vehicle to provide a *vraisemblable* narrative.

As the aforementioned examples illustrate, the *Goyuigō* contains several motivated narratives that serve to provide a reinterpretation of Kūkai's autobiography. The *Goyuigō* is the first in a series of texts that recasts Kūkai as a Buddhist prodigy from birth. Also, the manner in which Kūkai

[76] KZ 2: 46-47.

uses dreams in order to create a *vraisemblable* narrative furthers the process of legitimization.

Chapter Three
Biographical Texts Written Shortly After Kūkai's Death

The contents of the *Sangō Shiki, Shōrai Mokuroku,* and the *Goyuigō* show that Kūkai exerted a great deal of influence on the creation of his biographical tradition. The contents of these texts, particularly the *Goyuigō,* are often quoted or summarized in later versions of his biography. Shortly after Kūkai's death in 835, his disciple Shinzei[77] is credited with producing two texts that further establish and legitimate the Kūkai legend. The first is the *Henjō Hakki Shōryōshū* (遍照発揮性霊集),[78] a collection of Kūkai's Chinese prose and poetry compiled by Shinzei shortly after his death.[79] The second text, the *Kūkai Sōzuden* (空海僧都伝), a short work in Chinese traditionally attributed to Shinzei, is believed to be the oldest extant Kūkai biography.[80] While Kūkai's autobiographical texts justify his existence as an esoteric Buddhist, the texts written and compiled after his death serve to further strengthen and legitimize his lineage and teachings.

One rationale for producing biographical texts after Kūkai's death becomes apparent upon examining the relationship between Kūkai and the Nara Buddhist establishment. Recent scholarship asserts that the

[77] Shinzei (真済、800-860) was also known as Kōyū Sōjō (高雄僧正), Kakimoto Sōjō (柿本僧正), or Ki-no-Sōjō (紀ノ僧正). Like Kūkai, he started out studying the Confucian classics, but became a Buddhist monk at a young age. He studied both Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism, and later studied esoteric Buddhism under Kūkai. In 826, at the age of 25, he received transmission in both the Womb and Diamond mandalas. He died at the age of 61. In a petition made to Emperor Yōsei (陽成) in 878, Shinzei was listed as Kūkai's lead disciple (Watanabe, et. al., 39)
[78] Abe refers to this text as the *Henjō Kongō Hakki Shōryōshū* (遍照金剛発揮性霊集). This text is also known by the abbreviated names *Shōryōshū* and *Seireishū* (same characters) (ibid, 39). I will refer to this text as the *Shōryōshū* for the remainder of this thesis.
[79] There is some debate as to when the *Shōryōshū* was compiled. One theory holds that it was compiled in the latter years of Kūkai's life. However, the generally accepted view is that is compiled shortly after Kūkai's death in 835 (Watanabe, et. al., 37).
[80] Abe, 71.

cornerstones of the Shingon sect were laid when Kūkai was appointed to manage the Tōji temple in Kyōto and commenced construction of the Mt. Kōya monastic complex. The evidence in support of this argument is that when Kūkai was appointed to manage Tōji, he sent a document to the court requesting that only those trained in Shingon Buddhism be appointed resident priests. This request has led many scholars to believe that the Shingon sect and its monasteries were fully functional and independent of the Nara Buddhist establishment. Also, Kūkai's request that only priests trained in Shingon be appointed to Tōji has led some to view Tōji as Japan's first sectarian temple.[81]

However, Abe points out that at the time of Kūkai's death, neither the Tōji nor Kōyasan monastic complexes were anywhere near completion, much less functional. Furthermore, of the first fourteen charter resident priests appointed by the court, only two were direct disciples of Kūkai. The other twelve, although trained in Kūkai's Shingon teachings, were already officially affiliated with such Nara temples as Tōdaiji, Gangōji, Kōfukuji, and Hōryūji. This indicates that primary affiliation with the traditional Nara Buddhist establishment and receiving Kūkai's Shingon teachings were not mutually exclusive. Also, with only twenty-four resident priests, Tōji was woefully understaffed; it was not until 1113, almost two and a half centuries after Kūkai's death, that Tōji's complement of resident priests was increased to the originally promised number of fifty.[82]

Tōji's personnel and construction problems were compounded by its relative financial weakness. Since Buddhism was a state-sponsored enterprise in the Nara and Heian periods, temples received annual government

[81] Abe, 60-61.

[82] Abe, 60-61.

stipends for repairs and the housing of resident priests. However, the state's tight financial situation, together with construction delays at Tōji and Kōyasan, limited Tōji's stipend to a mere fifteen *kan* a year, only fifteen percent of the amount received by the major Nara temples.[83]

Abe's examination of Tōji's and Kōyasan's early Heian finances and circumstances shows that Kūkai and the Shingon sect were nowhere near as influential as the Nara temples. This contradicts traditional notions that Kūkai was firmly established as a Buddhist leader by the time of his death, and that the Shingon sect was an independent entity in direct competition with the Nara establishment. Therefore, it was necessary for Kūkai's successors to continue producing biographies in order to establish Kūkai and his Shingon teachings as legitimate.

Poetry and Prose as Memorial: The *Henjō Hakki Shōryōshū*

The *Shōryoshū* is a collection of Chinese prose, poetry, letters, and epitaphs composed, or received, by Kūkai. Consisting of ten fascicles, the *Shōryōshū* contains 111 documents, including Kūkai's letters to the Chinese government, petitions to the Japanese court to acquire land for the Kōyasan temple complex, Kūkai's request to be allowed to resign from his official duties and move to Mt. Kōya due to poor health, and a number of poems. The *Shōryōshū* also contains a "votive document" (J: 願文、*gammon*) that describes the first Shingon ceremony Kūkai performed in Japan.[84] Entitled "Votive Text on the Occasion of a Memorial Ceremony for the Departed Mother of Tanaka, Vice-Governor of Dazaifu," this document extols the

[83] Abe, 60.

[84] David L. Gardiner, "Japan's First Shingon Ceremony" In George J. Tanabe, Jr., ed., *Religions of Japan in Practice* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 156-158.

virtues of Tanaka's deceased wife and describes the paintings of esoteric deities and the sutras prepared for the ceremony. The third and fourth fascicles contain correspondence between Kūkai and the emperor, evidence of the amicable relationship he enjoyed with the court. As an anthology of primary texts that reveal his thought, attest to his achievements, and solidify his lineage, the *Shōryōshū* further legitimizes Kūkai. Also, the tendency to use quotations as a means to create an orthodox Kūkai legend tradition is evident in Shinzei's preface to the *Shōryōshū,* which contains passages from the *Shōrai Mokuroku* and *Goyuigō.* For example, Shinzei quotes the *Shōrai Mokuroku* almost verbatim when he recalls Kūkai's first encounter with Hui-guo.

One of Kūkai's achievements glorified by the legend tradition is his facility in languages. In the *Shōrai Mokuroku,* Kūkai mentions studying Sanskrit mantras under Hui-kuo; in addition, the biography of Hui-guo prepared by his lay disciple Wu-yin describes Kūkai's ease in speaking with the master in both Chinese and Sanskrit.[85] Similarly, Shinzei's preface mentions Kūkai's linguistic abilities.

Contained in the *Shōryōshū* is a letter Kūkai wrote to the Chinese authorities in Fujian requesting permission for Ambassador Fujiwara-no-Kadomaro and his party to come ashore and proceed to Chang-an. Kadomaro's four ships were supposed to sail to Ming-chou, but stormy seas forced them off course. Two of the ships were lost to the storm; a third made it to Ming-chou. Kadomaro's ship, however, drifted through the South China Sea until it arrived in Fu-chou, a city near modern-day Fujian.[86]

Since it was unusual for Japanese ships to drift so far south, the local

[85] Abe, 118-119.
[86] Abe, 114.

Chinese authorities initially denied Kadomaro and his party permission to come ashore. The Japanese mission's difficulties were compounded by the fact that the new local government had never had a Japanese ship in their jurisdiction. Although the ship's passengers included scribes and translators, Kadomaro asked Kūkai to compose a letter to the Fu-chou authorities. Eventually, Kadomaro and his party were allowed to proceed to Chang-an, but Kūkai was not granted permission. Since Kūkai's purpose for going to China was to study in Chang-an, he wrote a second letter.[87] Included in the *Shōryoshū* under the heading "An Epistle to the Magistrate of Fu-chou Asking Permission to Enter Ch'ang-an," it reads:

> Kūkai, a student-monk from the country of Japan, bids you respect. Kūkai's talents are unknown; there is nothing noteworthy about his speech or actions. However, he knows this: sleeping in the snow he uses his elbow as a pillow; he partakes of wild vegetables atop the peaks enshrouded by clouds. Limited to twenty years,[88] he seeks the One Vehicle. His duty is daunting, humans are weak, and he loathes the passage of time. Now, he would like to inquire as to why he has been denied permission to enter the capital as part of the Ambassador's entourage. He would like to make clear his reasons; this is all he asks. However, time does not stand still, and he is not one with time. How heavy is the burden the State has placed upon him; it is possible to vainly throw away time like it was an arrow. This is why he bemoans his confinement here and yearns to proceed to the Capital at once. Your Excellency's virtue has been recognized by the Son of Heaven, your benevolence reaches near and far. The streets are filled with the old and frail lining up to praise your virtue; men and women praising your merits fill Kūkai's ears. On the outside, you show your worldly virtue , on the inside, your heart is drawn to the true teachings.[89] He humbly beseeches you to allow him to enter the capital so that he may propagate this path. That is why he wants to call upon a revered monk soon and accomplish his goals. Thus far, he has not accomplished his humble task. His boldly writing you is an offense to your senses that will deepen your ill will toward him. Humbly,

[87] Abe, 114-115.

[88] Kūkai was originally supposed to stay in China for twenty years.

[89] Buddhism.

Tenth month, Twentieth year of Zheng Yuan[90]
Kūkai, student monk from Japan

To Your Excellency[91]

Supposedly, the Fu-chou authorities were so impressed by Kūkai's letter that he was granted permission to proceed to Chang-an. Once again, Kūkai reveals the breadth of his classical Chinese education in the second line, "However, he knows this: sleeping in the snow he uses his elbow as a pillow; he partakes of wild vegetables atop the peaks enshrouded by clouds." The first half of the line is a reference to the section of the *Analects* where Confucius said, "The Master says, 'Eating poor food, drinking water, and bending one's elbow to use as a pillow — this is where joy is. To me, fame and fortune attained through immoral means are like a floating cloud."[92] However, by replacing the word 'cloud' with 'snow,' Kūkai modifies the *Analects* quote to express his humility and diligence. Although this letter does not directly legitimize Kūkai as an esoteric master or enhance the prestige of Shingon, it does attest to Kūkai's linguistic abilities and literary knowledge, something frequently mentioned in later biographies.

Kūkai's letter to the Fu-chou authorities is an example of a *Shōryōshū* selection that became part of the greater Kūkai legend. Another example, found at the end of the second fascicle, is entitled "An Epitaph to the Ācarya Hui-guo of the Qing-long si temple in the Great Tang Sacred Capital, National Teacher of Three Reigns." Kūkai opens the memorial as follows:

> What the worldly value are the Five Cardinal Virtues; what the Buddhists value are the Three Insights. Loyalty, filial piety — these are inscribed on golden tablets. These Buddhist virtues are like the heavens, yet why are they hidden away in stone chambers? When I

[90] 804.

[91] NKBT 71: 270-272.

[92] Kuwabara Takeo, ed., *Rongo* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1985), 175.

> pondered this matter, I realized that the Dharma does not fall, and it does not fall because of people. Someone knows this Dharma, and where is this person? Here, in the Eastern Stupa Hall of the Qing-long-si temple in the sacred capital, is the great ācarya Hui-guo. The great master was born into the Ma family of Zhāo Ying; he could bring forth and destroy a Dharma citadel with a clap of his hands. The heavens entrusted Hui-guo with its supreme purity, the earth polished his divine spirit. He was from the seed of a phoenix, he sprouted into a dragon-horse. Soaring high, he chose his tree. He did not get ensnared in the net of the vulgar world. The master strode mightily like a lion and occupied his domain. The petals of the blossoms of the esoteric teachings truly are superior. Hui-guo studied under the Meditation Master Da Zhao, of the Da Sheng Shan temple, who was a disciple of the Great Tripitaka Master of Vast Knowledge.[93] A long time ago, when locks of hair draped from Hui-guo's head,[94] he accompanied his master and met the Tripitaka Master. When the Tripitaka Master took one look at Hui-kuo, he could not help but be surprised. He said, "You will be the one to uphold my esoteric teachings..."[95]

Like Kūkai's description of his first encounter with Hui-guo in the *Shōrai Mokuroku,* this epitaph informs the Japanese of Hui-guo's eminence, and by extension, Kūkai's legitimacy. As in the *Shōrai Mokuroku,* Kūkai here uses motivated narrative to establish his master's greatness. Although the *Shōryōshū* was compiled soon after Kūkai's death, Kūkai wrote this memorial shortly after Hui-guo's death in 805. Therefore, a more detailed, motivated narrative was necessary to introduce Hui-guo to the Japanese. A noteworthy aspect of Kūkai's description of Hui-guo's first meeting with Amoghavajra is that it parallels Kūkai's first meeting with Hui-guo. When Amoghavajra saw Hui-guo for the first time, he recognized his potential as a future successor. Shinzei's preface to the *Shōryōshū* mentions that Hui-guo said, "I have waited for so long" when he first met Kūkai, and it describes

[93] Amoghavajra's full title. Refer to the section on Kūkai's autobiographies for more information on Amoghavajra.
[94] Hui-kuo was probably around seven or eight years of age at the time (Watanabe et. al., 198).
[95] NKBT 71: 197-198.

Kūkai's studies as "pouring water from one vase into another." In this memorial to Hui-guo, Kūkai attempts to legitimize himself by showing that his relationship with Hui-guo was a preferential one, similar to Hui-guo's relationship with Amoghavajra. Kūkai may have also been trying to legitimize Hui-guo as the true recipient of Amoghavajra's teachings, since it seems that Hui-lang, not Hui-guo, was initially named Amoghavajra's successor. However, by the time Kūkai arrived in China, Hui-guo had emerged as the leader of Amoghavajra's disciples.[96] Further testimony of Hui-guo's wisdom is found in the phrase "Soaring high, he chose his tree...," traditionally interpreted to mean that Hui-guo successfully broke away from the conventional choices of exoteric teachers and chose an excellent master.[97]

After Kūkai establishes Hui-guo as the true successor to Amoghavajra, he describes Hui-guo's activities in the Tang court, using some of the same language found in the *Shōrai Mokuroku.* Once again, Kūkai writes that Hui-guo had the respect of three emperors, held the title of National Teacher, was revered by the four classes of believers, and received *abhiseka.* However, in contrast to the *Shōrai Mokuroku* account, the epitaph describes some of the esoteric rituals Hui-guo performed at court, such as summoning the mystical *nāga* dragon[98] during periods of drought, and summoning the *garuda* bird[99] to dry up floods. It is also mentions that Hui-guo performed rituals to quell malevolent spirits. Unlike the *Shōrai Mokuroku,* which just makes a passing reference to Hui-kuo's services at court, the *Shōryōshū* uses motivated

[96] Abe, 121-122.

[97] Watanabe et. al., eds., 198.

[98] The *nāga* dragon was believed to summon clouds and make it rain (Watanabe et. al., eds., 200).

[99] The *garuda* bird, representing the sun, is said to eat dragons, which are believed to bring storms (Sawa, 98).

narratives to provide concrete examples of the practical value of esoteric Buddhist practices. For example:

> Hui-guo taught the secret treasury and indicates its profundity. Reciting the esoteric teachings and the dhārani of Mahāpratisārā, he held these teachings in his heart. He recited the "Praises of the Practice of Samantahadra" and "Praises of the Dharma-body of Manjusri." When he was fourteen or fifteen, he had many mystical experiences with the gods and Buddhas. Emperor Dai-zōng heard about this, issued an imperial edict, and welcomed Hui-guo at the court. He decreed, "I, the Emperor, have doubts. Please, make it so I can decide!" Hui-guo, in accordance with the Dharma of Mahesvara [Daijisaiten, the Supreme Creator], summoned Mahesvara to clear the Emperor's doubts, and his doubts were untangled and made into a flowing river. The Emperor exclaimed, "The child of a dragon [reference to Hui-guo], although young, knows how to make it rain. This is not an empty saying, it will be recorded on the belts of the retainers. A marvelous little Buddha is in our presence." From that time on, a stallion of good steed brought Hui-guo to the court whenever needed, and he lacked none of the Four Things [clothing, food/drink, steeped medicines, and bedding]. At the age of twenty, he studied diligently, using the reflection from the snow for light. The waves from the great sea of the Tripitaka lapped against his lips. The mirror of the Five Parts of the Diamond Realm [Buddhas, Diamonds, Treasures, Lotus, and Emptiness] has the clarity of a mystical dias. The reverberations of the Great Bell, is either silence or a sermon in accordance with the character and faculties [of the practitioner]; the reverberations of an empty valley are the same. In the beginning, he learned the Dharma of the Precepts in Four Parts, later, he received *abhiseka* in the Three Mysteries. Even the sharp wit of Mi Tian was no match for Hui-guo. For this reason, three emperors respected him and made him a National Teacher. The four classes of believers revered him and received abhiseka. When a drought scorched the leaves, Hui-guo summoned a *naga* dragon and it rained. When there was a deluge and the dam burst, he summoned a *garuda* bird, and it dried up.[100]

However, even with Kūkai's testimonial to the benefits of esoteric ritual, almost ten years passed after his return from China before he was allowed to perform these rituals at court.

The memorial concludes with the following:

[100] NKBT 71: 198.

> On the evening of the Master's death, he appeared before me in a vision, and said, "You may not know this yet, but our karmic ties run deep. Throughout our many reincarnations, our vow has been to propagate the esoteric teachings. Whether here or there, whether master or student, it is an endless cycle. That is why you have come from afar to receive my profound esoteric teachings. Your studies are complete; my prayers have been fulfilled. In the Western Land,[101] you touched my feet. I will be reborn in the Eastern Land[102] and be your disciple.[103]

This passage can be interpreted as a *vraisemblable* narrative. It is *vraisemblable* because, much like the *Goyuigō,* dreams and visions are used to create plausible narrative. Also, Hui-guo's declaration that he and Kūkai were destined from past lives to spread the esoteric teachings is *vraisemblant* because discussions of karmic ties are conventional in Buddhist contexts.

The *Shōryōshū* must have been well-received in the Heian period and beyond, since later texts such as the *Konjaku Monogatarishū*[104] rely on the *Shōryōshū* for biographical information on Kūkai.[105] Undoubtedly, later hagiographers were aided by the large number of copies and commentaries of the *Shōryōshū* produced by medieval Shingon scholars. However, while all the texts discussed to this point — from the *Sangō Shiki* to the *Shōryōshū* — have biographical content, they are not biographies in the truest sense of the word. However, Kūkai's death in 835 marks the starting point of the Kūkai biographical tradition.

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[101] Tang China.

[102] Japan.

[103] NKBT 71:204.

[104] Bibliographic information on the *Konjaku Monogatarishū* appears in the previous section, "Kūkai's Autobiographical Writings."

[105] Watanabe et. al., eds., 15.

The First Kūkai Biography: *The Kūkai Sōzuden*

The oldest extant Kūkai biography is the *Kūkai Sōzuden* (空海僧都伝), traditionally attributed to Shinzei.[106] Although written by his top disciple, the *Kūkai Sōzuden* is in fact a very short text, especially when compared to Kūkai's autobiographical works. Hakeda considers the *Kūkai Sōzuden* to be the "least exaggerated" of the Kūkai biographies.[107] The work is divided into the following sections: birth, studies, declaration to become a priest, ascetic training on Shikoku, discovery of esoteric sutras, voyage to China, establishment of the Shingon school, a short history of the esoteric patriarchs, retirement atop Mt. Kōya, and finally, death. For the most part, the content of the *Kūkai Sōzuden* is not much different than that of the texts previously discussed: for example, the section dealing with his early years describes him as a Buddhist prodigy, and the section describing his studies under Hui-kuo is a short summary of existing texts, such as the *Shōrai Mokuroku.* However, although this text may be very short, the motivated narratives it contains make a major contribution to the creation of the Kūkai legend. On the origins of Kūkai's family, Shinzei writes,

> The ordination name of the late eminent senior priest Kūkai is Henjō Kongō. His worldly name was Saeki-no-atai, and he was from Tado County, Sanuki Province. The clan's origins are from the imperial

[106] Although the *Kūkai Sōzuden* is traditionally attributed to Shinzei, there is some debate over its authorship. In the *Gonyūjō kanketsushō* (御入定勘決鈔), the priest Saisen (済暹、 1025-1115) points out that it is unlikely a leading disciple like Shinzei would have signed the biography of his master as "an anonymous priest." (Shimpō Ryūshō, "Kūkai Sōzuden kaisetsu" in *Kōbō Daishi Kūkai zenshū* v. 2 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1986), 20-21. Also, Shimpō questions whether someone who wrote such a stylistically ornate entry to the *Shōryōshū* would have written such a terse biography. Finally, the work's lack of detail casts doubt on Shinzei's authorship, since it is not unreasonable to assume that he would have read the *Goyuigō.* However, I will frame my arguments on the *Kūkai Sōzuden* assuming that Shinzei is the author, since the purpose of this section of the thesis is to examine how the post-Kūkai Shingon establishment continued the Kūkai legend tradition.

[107] Hakeda, 15.

> family. The next patriarch of the Saiki family accompanied Yamato Takeru in the subjugation of the Emishi. For his service to Yamato Takeru, he was awarded land, and later built a house in Tado County. This is clearly written in the annals of the National Histories. Later, he became head of the Sanuki provincial government's regional office in Tado County.[108] (KZ II: 5)

There are three distinct differences between Shinzei's retelling of the history of Kūkai's family and what Kūkai wrote in the *Goyuigō*. First, Shinzei asserts that Kūkai is related to the imperial family. Second, while the *Goyuigō* does mention that Kūkai's ancestors fought the Emishi, Shinzei includes the detail that Kūkai's ancestors fought the Emishi under the command of the legendary Yamato Takeru. Finally, Shinzei attests to the accuracy of this information by informing the reader that everything he has written thus far can also be found in the official National Histories (J: 国史、*kokushi*).

Since the early Shingon temples were not on par with the powerful Nara temples in terms of state patronage, there were certainly political advantages to drawing attention to the fact that Kūkai was of imperial origins. Also, mentioning that Kūkai's ancestors fought alongside Yamato Takeru reminds the reader of the Saeki clan's glory days. However, Abe points out that by Kūkai's time, the fortunes of the Saeki clan had declined:

> ...Politically well-connected, the Saeki prospered in the mid-Nara period and then went into gradual decline. Its most renowned figure was Saeki-no-Imaemishi (719-790), who served on the courts of six successive emperors — Shōmu, Kōken, Junnin, Shōtoku, Kōnin, and Kanmu — and was best known for having supervised the construction of Tōdaiji. In 775, Imaemishi was appointed by Emperor Kōnin to be ambassador to China, but because of illness was unable to assume the post. Later, Kanmu appointed him one of the supervisors of construction for the new capital at Nagaoka. However, because the Saeki clan was a branch family of the Ōtomo clan, which had been held responsible for the 785 assassination of Kanmu's protégé Fujiwara Tanetsugu, many of the Saeki were implicated in the plot, and the

[108] KZ 2: 5.

> clan's political influence was severely weakened. In 786, one year after Kūkai began his studies with with Atō-no-Ōtari, Imaemishi, who once held the high court office of sangi, special counselor, was demoted to magistrate of the port city of Dazaifu in Kyūshū, and in 789 was forced to retire from public service altogether.[109]

Therefore, it was necessary for Shinzei to reintroduce the past glory of the Saeki clan through the medium of motivated narrative.

Furthermore, the *Kūkai Sōzuden* is one of the first texts to discuss the extraordinary feats Kūkai performed. In the *Shōryōshū*, Kūkai wrote about Hui-guo's ability to use esoteric rituals to summon rain, stop floods, and appease vengeful spirits. In a similar fashion, Shinzei writes,

> In the second year of Daidō, my master returned to Japan. From that point on, he served four emperors, built ordination platforms for the benefit of the state, and performed rituals[110] fifty-one times. He performed numerous miracles, he made the wind stop and the rain fall. From the emperor down to the masses, many received *abhisekha* from him. The tradition of *abhiseka*, along with the establishment of Shingon teachings, began with my master.[111]

Just as Kūkai demonstrates the value of esoteric Buddhism in China in the *Shōryōshū*, Shinzei describes how Japan has already benefitted from esoteric Buddhism. Since the Nara temples traditionally held a monopoly over performing ritual services[112] for the state, Shinzei's declaration suggests that esoteric Buddhist rituals were equally important.

Finally, the *Kūkai Sōzuden* provides a summary of Kūkai's lineage. It is not unique in this regard; Kūkai himself provides a description of the

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[109] Abe, 71.

[110] This is my translation of *hō wo shusuru* (法を修する).

[111] KZ 2: 8-9.

[112] Pre-*mikkyō* rituals in Nara Japan included *dhāranī* chanting and *keka*(悔過) repentance rituals. *Dhāranī* chanting was used to cure illness, while *keka* rituals were used to rid the nation of the evil karma that was believed to cause famine, plague, and droughts (Abe, 163-164).

esoteric patriarchs in the *Shingon Fuhōden* (真言付法伝).[113] However, the *Kūkai Sōzuden* also includes Kūkai in the lineage. Also, while earlier texts go into great detail concerning Kūkai's relationship with Hui-guo, the *Kūkai Sōzuden* provides a complete listing of the esoteric patriarchs going back to Mahavairocana Buddha:

> The transmission from master to student started with the High Patriarch, the Tathagāta Mahāvairocana. Mahāvairocana transmitted the teachings to Vajrasatta, who then transmitted them to Nāgārjuna. Nāgārjuna then transmitted the teachings to Vajrabodhi, who transmitted them to Nāgabodhi. Nāgabodhi transmitted the teachings to Amoghavajra, the Great Tripitaka Master of Broad Knowledge of the Da xīng shan ssu temple, National *Abhisekha* Master to Emperors Xuan-zōng, Su-zōng, and Dai-zōng. Hui-kuo was Amoghavajra's top disciple. There are eight masters all together, including Kūkai.[114]

In early Heian Japan, lineages can be considered a form of *vraisemblable* narrative because lineages were viewed as a means of creating orthodoxy and legitimacy. Particularly significant here is the incorporation of Nāgārjuna, the famed Mādhyamika scholar-priest, into an esoteric lineage. Kūkai states that Nāgārjuna entered an iron tower in southern India in search of the true teachings and found Vajrasattva there, who gave him *abhiseka* on the spot.[115] Naturally, Nāgārjuna was well known among the Nara priests, so adding him to Kūkai's lineage could only serve to strengthen it.

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[113] Written by Kūkai, the *Shingon Fuhōden* is a summary of the esoteric Buddhist lineage from Mahāvairocana down to Hui-guo.

[114] KZ 2: 9.

[115] Abe, 221.

Chapter Four
Medieval Appropriations of Kūkai

By the medieval period (1185-1333), the Kōyasan temple, Kūkai legends, the Shingon sect, and Kūkai worship were firmly established in Japanese Buddhist discourse. Although traditional scholarship claims that the influence of the Shingon sect, along with the other schools of "Old Buddhism,"[116] started to decline during the medieval period due to the rise of the Pure Land, Zen, and Nichiren sects, the continued popularity of esoteric rituals shows that this was not the case. Also, the construction of new Shingon temples in the countryside underscores the popularity the Shingon sect enjoyed among the masses. Actually, Shingon temples outnumbered those affiliated with the new Kamakura sects. Furthermore, as word of Kūkai's miracles and abilities spread throughout the provinces, a cult centered around Kūkai worship emerged. However, while Kōyasan was enjoying immense popularity with both the court and the general public, old Nara temples like Tōdaiji were struggling to regain their influence.

During the Nara and early Heian periods, the state-imposed *sōniryō*[117] Buddhist hierarchy, in addition to the state sponsorship of Buddhist temples, guaranteed the status of the Nara temples. Enforcement of the *sōniryō* was the responsibility of the *sōgō* (僧綱、Office of Priestly Affairs), an agency in the Nara and early Heian Confucian bureaucracy. However, by the tenth century, the state began to loosen its enforcement of the *sōniryō* system. The final blow to the *sōniryō* came during the medieval period, when the state

[116] "Old Buddhism" refers to the Six Nara Sects (Hossō, Jōjitsu, Kegon, Sanron, Ritsu, Kusha) in addition to the Shingon and Tendai sects.

[117] The *sōniryō* (僧尼令) was the rules of conduct for Buddhists priests and nuns established by the Nara government. The *sōniryō* also provided a ranking and promotion system parallel to that of the Nara literati-bureaucrats. The ultimate implication of the *sōniryō* was that the temples were organs of the state, and that priests and nuns were in effect government employees.

devolved the enforcement of the *sōniryo* system to the individual temples. Although a weakened *sōniryō* system was to the temples' advantage because the state was not as involved in temple affairs,[118] it also meant that the temples were purged from the core of the Japanese bureaucracy.[119] Abe provides the following analysis:

> By the mid-tenth century, the court seems to have abandoned its effort to enforce the Sōniryō, or Rules for Priests and Nuns, the part of the ritsuryō that had provided the Sōgō with the power to assume collective leadership of the Sangha. Although the Sōniryō itself was not abolished, from then on the Sōgō changed from an administrative apparatus to a system of honorific ranks. As the only objective standard for comparing the status of eminent priests across the Six Nara Schools, Shingon, and Tendai, the appointment to the Sōgō became a coveted prize, pursued by the major monastic institutions, which, having gained independence from the state, became increasingly competitive with one another, not only in the religious field, but also politically and economically.[120]

The medieval period saw more than one attempt to revive the prestige of old Nara temples like Tōdaiji and Old Buddhism in general. However, as Tanabe points out, this "revival" did not mandate a conservative approach to doctine or tradition:

> ...the revivers of old Buddhism were not conservatives bent on restructuring the past as it had been, but were true reformers who were aware of the past as history, that is, as a process of events that change.

[118] Conversely, it can be argued that the state was more involved than ever in temple affairs, because the absence of state regulation meant that powerful temples were using the Bakufu court system as a means to settle disputes regarding doctrine and succession. For example, influential Tendai priests petitioned the Bakufu court system to declare Shinran's (J: 親鸞、1173-1262) teachings heretical. Also, since the Bakufu adopted primogeniture as the legal standard for succession, the courts were flooded with lawsuits seeking decrees ordering changes in succession. In any case, the former state temples were on their own insofar as garnering popular support.

[119] This does not mean that the state completely withdrew from the business of running temples. In the provinces, the state still operated 'national branch temples' (J: 国分寺、*kokubunji*). These temples, like their Nara counterparts in the heyday of state Buddhism, were charged with protecting the nation and guaranteeing a good harvest (Nakamura, 265).

[120] Abe, 371.

> They were conscious of themselves as people who stood within that process of change, and who inherited something that did not demand a return to it but provided guidelines for the formulation of their own journey to the future. They also knew that much of their past was corrupt and worthy of destruction, that too much emphasis had been placed on ritual formalism for the sake of official rank and recognition.[121]

Although originally trained in Shingon Buddhism, Myōe Shōnin (明恵上人、1173-1232), is best known as the reviver of the Kegon Sect and fundraiser for the reconstruction of Tōdaiji's Great Buddha. Another transsectarian reviver, who was also an expert in Sung architecture, Chōgen (重源、1121-1205), oversaw the reconstruction of the Tōdaiji temple, which was burned down by Taira Shigehira (平重衡、1118-1181) in 1180. Although both Myōe and Chōgen worked to revive Kegon teachings, their transsectarian interests showed their ability to appreciate emerging trends in Japanese Buddhist thought while working to resurrect old truths.

However, the revivers of Old Buddhism were not the only ones working to legitimize themselves in the medieval Buddhist landscape. The leaders of the aforementioned new Kamakura sects also needed to show that they were just as legitimate as the old Nara sects, Shingon, and Tendai. Although the simpler teachings of the new Kamakura sects were gaining popularity with the masses, these sects lacked the long history that the academic Old Buddhist sects had. On the one hand, the Old Buddhists were trying to revive and legitimize themselves by rebuilding great symbols such as the Tōdaiji temple and the Great Buddha; on the other hand, the Kamakura sects were attempting to gain followers and establish legitimacy with their simpler, more accessible doctrine. On the competition between the

[121] Tanabe, *Myōe*, 35.

old and new Buddhism, Tanabe observes,

> Both camps were deeply involved in a process of reformation spurred by the common doubts they all had about which form of Buddhism could produce visions of realities more perfect than those of the political and social world. The result was an outpouring of a great diversity of interpretations. While Hōnen was discovering that rebirth in the Pure Land was possible by reciting Amida's name; Shinran that Amida Buddha saves even those who are evil; Dōgen that enlightenment was achievable just by meditative sitting; and Nichiren that a text, the Lotus Sutra, could save; the Old Buddhists were regaining their confidence in traditions that were rediscovered and renewed through a newly awakened historical consciousness.[122]

In fact, both the old and new Buddhists needed historically established Buddhist figures and plausible hagiographic traditions in order to complete the process of legitimization. This is where Kūkai legends enter the picture. In this section I will examine two medieval hagiographic collections: the *Nihon Kōsōden Yōmonshō,* compiled by the Tōdaiji monk Sōshō, and the *Genkō Shakushō,* compiled by the Rinzai monk Kokan Shiren, and see how these collections appropriated Kūkai legends.

Recovering Native Buddhist History: The *Nihon Kōsōden Yōmonshō*

Hagiography and lineage were both important tools in the campaign to revive the prestige of the old Nara sects. Sōshō (宗性, 1202-1278), a Tōdaiji monk, reviver of Old Buddhism, and member of the Fujiwara clan, compiled the *Nihon Kōsōden Yōmonshō* (日本高僧伝要文、henceforth *Yōmonshō*), a collection of biographies of eminent Japanese priests. Compiled between 1249 and 1251, the Yōmonshō is one of the oldest priest biography collections in existence. It contains forty-four biographies, starting with the Indian monk Baramon and ending with Kako (dates and secular name unknown), an

[122] Tanabe, *Myōe,* 32.

aristocratic lay practitioner[123] from the Hozumi clan. The *Yōmonshō* was not written by Sōshō; the text draws heavily on several Heian period biographies and the *Enryaku Sōroku* (延暦僧録), which was written by a Tang immigrant monk in 788.[124]

The section on Kūkai draws from the *Kōbō Daishiden* (弘法大師伝), a biography probably written in the Heian period. Although its basic content does not differ much from earlier biographical texts such as the *Shōrai Mokuroku*, the *Goyuigō*, and the *Kūkai Sōzuden*. the Yōmonshō's narration of Kūkai's life is far more detailed. It opens with the following passage:

> According to Volume One of the *Biography of Kōbō Daishi*, he held the rank of Great Superior Priest and Dharma Seal. His posthumous name was Kūkai, and his ordination name was Henjō Kongō. The highest rank he attained during his lifetime was Great Senior Priest General and Transmitter of the Dharma Torch. He was born in Byōbugaura, Tado County, Sanuki Province. His father was Saeki-no-Atai, and the Saeki clan was of imperial origins. A long time ago, his ancestor accompanied Yamato Takeru and subjugated the Hairy People (Emishi). Yamato Takeru awarded his ancestor with land, upon which he built a house. These details are included in the National Histories. (According to the *Ansei shiroku*, Ōtari is the descendant of Prince Inase-irihiko-no-mikoto, the son of Emperor Hikoshinobiyo, who is the grandson of Aratsuwake-no-mikoto's son Toyoshima. Emperor Ameyorozutoyohi, known posthumously as Emperor Kōtoku, bequeathed the rank of *atai* onto the Saeki clan during his reign).[125] The descendants of the the Saeki clan have continuously held the office of Regional Provincial Administrator. Kūkai's mother was from the Atō clan. His mother and father both dreamt that a holy man from India flew into his mother's womb and impregnated her. After twelve months passed, Kūkai was born. The year of his birth corresponded to the fifth year of Emperor Hōki's reign. When he was born there were many miraculous events a,nd he was extremely intelligent from a young age. He understood the affairs of humans. When he was around five or six years of age, he would often dream

[123] The index lists him as Koji Kako (居士加古). The term *koji* corresponds to the Sanskrit grha-pati, which refers to a lay practitioner (Nakamura, 270).
[124] Tanabe, 37.
[125] This portion is in parenthesis because it appears as an interlinear note.

> that he was sitting on an eight-petal lotus and conversing with the various Buddhas....[126]

Various elements of this account have appeared in earlier texts, but this is the first time that so many details of Kūkai's life have come together in a unified narrative. By the medieval period, the miraculous circumstances surrounding his birth and the extraordinary events that took place during his childhood have become standard elements of the narrative. Also, while earlier texts mention the Saeki clan's connections to the imperial family, this text is the first to provide a specific lineage. Just as the *Kūkai Sōzuden* included Kūkai's lineage to legitimize his esoteric lineage, the *Yōmonshō* included Kūkai's worldly lineage to establish his ties to the imperial family.

Another noteworthy aspect of the *Yōmonshō* is the way Sōshō directly quotes other sources. Certainly it was not unusual for medieval Japanese biography compilers to borrow heavily from earlier material. However, Sōshō's narrative style is unusual because he specifically cites his sources. For example, while the *Kūkai Sōzuden* begins with the phrase, "The ordination name of the late eminent senior priest Kūkai is Henjō Kongō...," Sōshō begins the *Yōmonshō's* section on Kūkai with "According to Volume One of the *Biography of Kōbō Daishi...*" After describing Kūkai's origins, Sōshō cites a passage from the *Ansei shiroku*[127] as evidence of Kūkai's connections to the imperial family. Once Kūkai's family lineage is established, Sōshō uses selections allegedly from the *Sangō Shiki* to provide background information on Kūkai's early years:

> In the *Sangō Shiki*, (Kūkai) writes, "When I came of age my name was Mukū. From the time I was eighteen years old, I left for the capital. Traversing mountain forests and steep mountains, I went on a

[126] KT 31:1.

[127] There does not seem to be any information on this lineage, other than that it exists.

> solitary journey through deep valleys and isolated seashores. I endured the rigors of meditating under waterfalls and the harshness of practicing in the snow in the dead of winter. Wearing wisteria robes, I was diligent in my asceticism. In the blistering summer heat, I refused food and drink while practicing repentance..."[128]

Interestingly, Sōshō's selection includes material that is actually not in the *Sangō Shiki,* such as the reference to Kūkai's solitary journey thorough deep valleys and isolated seashores. Also, Kūkai does not mention having the name of Mukū anywhere in his preface to the *Sangō Shiki.* Clearly, Sōshō's reference to the *Sangō Shiki* is actually a composite of more than one source.

Sōshō also quotes extensively from the *Shōryōshū.* Kūkai's letter to the Fu-chou provincial government is included in its entirety in the *Yōmonshō.* Although Sōshō does not cite the *Shōryōshū* as his source, a considerable number of *Shōryōshū* copies and commentaries were produced during the medieval period and circulated among the intelligensia. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that the intended reader of the *Yōmonshō* was familiar with the *Shōryōshū* and Kūkai's letter. The inclusion of Kūkai's letter serves to establish his linguistic prowess in the hagiographic tradition. Also, presenting the letter verbatim allows the medieval reader to see the quality of Kūkai's written Chinese firsthand.

Selections from Wu-yin's biography of Hui-kuo also appears in the *Yōmonshō:*

> It is also said in Wu-yin's compilation (Wu-yin is the author of Hui-kuo's biography):[129] "Hui-guo said to his disciples, 'The great teachings of the Diamond and Womb Mandalas are the secret treasury of the various Buddhas. These teachings are the path that leads to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. I pray that you all sever the passions that permeate the Dharma realm. I have conferred mastership

[128] KT 31: 2.

[129] This passage appears in parenthesis because it appears in the print version as an interlinear note.

> in the Womb Mandala to Bian-hong of Java and Hui-ri of Silla. I have conferred the teachings of the Great Dharma of the Diamond Realm to Wei-shang of Jian-nan and Yi-yuan of Hebei. Imperial Chaplain Yi-ming[130] has received transmission in both mandalas. With us today we have the Japanese monk Kūkai who has come seeking the sacred teachings. Through the profound secrets of both mandalas and their mudras, Kūkai received the contents of my mind whether in Chinese in Sanskrit; it was like pouring water from one vase to another. These six disciples are worthy of receiving the transmission of my Dharma Torch. My prayers have been fulfilled.'"[131]

Sōshō's use of quotation throughout the *Yōmonshō* is an attempt at creating an authoritative, *vraisemblable* narrative. In Japanese Buddhist texts, doctrinal or otherwise, quotation was a device frequently used to create *vraisemblance*. For example, the *Senchaku Hongan Nembutsushū* (選択本願念仏集、*Selected Passages on Reciting the Buddha's Name*), an anthology of selections from Pure Land doctrinal texts, contains a preface by Hōnen; however, it is the fact that it is a collection of selections from other texts that makes it authoritative.

The organization and content of the *Yōmonshō* is indicative of Sōshō's agenda to revive Old Buddhism. Since Sōshō was affiliated with Tōdaiji, one might expect him to include biographies of such famous Nara period monks as Ganjin, Gyōgi, Dōshō and Ryōben. This absence of Ryōben's biography is curious, since he was the one who, at least according to legend, managed to secure the gold for Tōdaiji's Great Buddha. Also, although the *Yōmonshō* does contain a biography of Shōtoku Taishi, it is extremely short and not prominently placed.

[130] Abe and Hakeda refer to him using the Wade-Giles spelling of I-ming. "Imperial Chaplain" is their translation of the term *gubu* (供奉). In China, the office of imperial chaplain existed from 756 until the end of the T'ang dynasty. The primary duty of the imperial chaplain was to read sutras at court for the benefit of the nation. A similar position was established in Japan in 772. (Nakamura, 211-212).
[131] KSTK 31: 4.

In contrast, Sōshō placed Kūkai's lengthy biography second in the collection, right after a one-paragraph treatment of the Indian monk Baramon (704-760). Also known as Bodhisena, Baramon arrived in Japan in 736. At the behest of Emperor Shōmu and Gyōgi, he presided over the "eye opening ceremony" of Tōdaiji's Great Buddha in 752. The prominent placement of Baramon and Kūkai's biographies has a two-pronged effect: it acknowledges Old Buddhism's ties to the Indian tradition, and it recognizes Kūkai's importance in Japanese Buddhist history. It certainly was not unusual for the revivalists to manipulate Japanese Buddhist history to further their own agendas, as Tanabe observes:

> ...Whether they saw themes changing in time, or time changing in accordance to certain themes, the monks of the early Kamakura period were keenly aware of history and the way in which it and all past knowledge could be structured and restructured. Their interest in the past, therefore, was not born of a simple desire to return to it, but to manipulate it for their present. Their religious thoughts and actions were largely determined by their historical understanding of where they stood in terms of where they came from. The violence that brought on such a fiery death of the past was accompanied by efforts at remembrance and reconstruction. The *Gukanshō's* reordering of the past was unique, but not an aberration. On the contrary, it was representative of the widespread concern for refashioning the past, just as the ruined Tōdaiji was rebuilt in a new form and style.[132]

Sōshō furthers his agenda by including selections that show Kūkai's ties to Tōdaiji. For example, the *Yōmonshō* mentions that the court decided "Kūkai should be allowed to build an *abisekha* platform at Tōdaiji for the benefit of the nation." (宜令空海法師於東大寺為国家建立灌頂道場、*yoroshiku Kūkai hōshi ni Tōdaiji ni oite kokka no tame kanjō no dōjō wo konryū seshimuru beshi*).[133] By including this motivated narrative in the *Yōmonshō*,

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[132] Tanabe, *Myōe*, 37.

[133] KSTK 31: 8

Sōshō makes it clear to the reader that before establishing himself at Tōji and Kōyasan, Kūkai was working within the Nara system.

Prior to his departure for China, Kūkai was part of the Nara State Buddhism establishment. Even after his return, he propagated esoteric teachings within the Nara establishment. Unlike Saichō, who took an adversarial stance toward the Nara institutions and isolated himself, Kūkai had a much more collegial relationship with them. Contrary to the traditional view, Kūkai did not establish the Shingon sect immediately after returning from China; it was not until 822 that he was allowed to build an *abisekha* platform at Tōdaiji. Abe provides the following analysis of Kūkai's relationship with the Nara clergy:

> By contrast, Kūkai's struggle appears to have been waged not in the arena of religious institutions but in the realm of discourse. Kūkai's strategy of persuasion opened a way for his aberrant form of Buddhism to be absorbed into the mainstream, where it could effect a metamorphisis in the religious establishment. The question that remains to be addressed is how Nara Buddhism came to accept Kūkai's esoteric Buddhism...Kūkai's interpretation of the precepts and the precept ordination provided him with an institutional common ground with the Nara Schools. This in turn made it possible for Kūkai and Nara to mount a joint opposition to Saichō and the separatist Tendai School. The court also found its patronage of Kūkai a useful means of ameliorating its strained relationship with the Nara clergy. These developments paved the way for Kūkai's abisekha, Mishuhō, and other esoteric rituals to become integrated withing the religious orthodoxy of the state, comparable in their legitimacy to the traditional sūtra recitations of and lectures by the Nara priests.[134]

In a sense, the *Yōmonshō*'s strategy is the inverse of Kūkai's. Kūkai worked within the Nara system to legitimize his esoteric Buddhism; he used the framework of Old Buddhism to propagate his new Buddhism. In contrast, by showing that Kūkai had ties to Tōdaiji, Sōshō uses Kūkai legends and the

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[134] Abe, 62.

power of the medieval Shingon institution to revive the prestige of Tōdaiji.

Using the Old to Justify the New: Kūkai in the *Genkō Shakusho*

The *Yōmonshō* used a popular image of Kūkai to revive Old Buddhism. However, the *Genkō Shakusho* (元亨釈書),[135] a thirty-volume Buddhist "history" compiled by the Rinzai monk Kokan Shiren (虎関師錬、1278-1346) in 1333, uses an old Kūkai to legitimize Zen Buddhism. Rinzai Zen was one of the sects affiliated with the new "Kamakura Buddhism," and was founded by Eisai (栄西、1141-1215).

Kokan Shiren was associated with the Five Mountains (J: 五山、*gozan*) group of Zen temples. His father was from the Fujiwara clan and his mother was from the Minamoto. He entered a Buddhist monastery at the age of eight and took the tonsure at the age of ten atop Mt. Hiei. He spent some time in the Kantō region, but eventually returned to Kyōto to study Confucianism. In addition to the *Genkō Shakusho,* he also wrote the *Butsugo Shinron* (仏語心論) and the *Zengi Gaibun shū* (禅儀外文集).

The *Genkō Shakusho* is divided into several sections: biographies of famous Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Buddhist priests (such as Bodhidharma, Subhakarasimha, Zhi-cang (智蔵), Ganjin (鑑真), Saichō , and Kūkai; biographies of other priests; major events in Japanese Buddhist history relating to the Imperial household; and finally, the histories of major Japanese temples. Supposedly, Kokan Shiren wrote this text in response to criticism that he was ignorant of Japanese Buddhist history. Tanabe's observations of medieval historiography confirm the medieval desire to

[135] This text is called the *Genkō Shakusho* because it was compiled in the second year of the Genkō era (1322).

recover native Buddhist history:

> An awareness of the history of Buddhism also caught up with Japan. Japanese Buddhists had always been aware of the history of their teaching in India and China, but it was only from about the twelfth century that the reformers of Nara Buddhism and some of their predecessors produced the first writings of the history of Buddhism in Japan. In general, there were two kinds of works: thematic studies and systematic summaries. The summaries were not, strictly speaking, histories, because they did not attempt to describe change according to categories or a chronology; nevertheless, they were related products insofar as they attempted to summarize and order all past knowledge in a given area. In doing so, sometimes they contained short historical essays.[136]

After Kokan Shiren's death, an imperial edict authorized the addition of the *Genkō Shakusho* to the Japanese Tripitaka.

The Kūkai biography that appears in the *Genkō Shakusho* summarizes the major points of his life: his birth, his discovery of Buddhism, his encounter with Master Hui-guo, and his founding of the Kōyasan temple complex. In this, the *Genkō Shakusho* does not differ much from earlier material; the same *vraisemblable* and motivated narratives that appeared in the *Yōmonshō* also appear in the *Genkō Shakusho.*

However, this text is noteworthy in the way it prominently places the biographies of eminent Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Indian priests at the beginning of the collection. Although the *Genkō Shakusho* is supposed to be a history of Japanese Buddhism in general, it seems to lean towards Zen since many of the priests featured have ties to Zen. This indicates that Kokan Shiren's agenda in compiling the *Genkō Shakusho* was to legitimize the hagiographies of Zen priests by placing them within the larger framework of East Asian Buddhist history. Unlike the medieval Nara establishement, which capitalized on the popularity of Kūkai worship in order to resurrect

[136] Tanabe, *Myōe,* 36.

Old Buddhism, the new Kamakura Buddhists used an old, historically established Kūkai in order to legitimize their new Buddhism.

Chapter Five
Conclusion

Kūkai is undoubtedly one of the most prominent figures in Japanese hagiography. While other priests may have just a short entry in a couple of biography collections, there is copius material on Kūkai. In the introduction to this study, I made reference to a survey done in 1934 that found 93 Kūkai-related texts spread out over 134 volumes. From a research standpoint, this is a mixed blessing; on one hand, the abundance of primary source material allows for highly detailed research, yet on the other hand, there is so much material that it is difficult to situate Kūkai precisely.

In analyzing Kūkai biographies, two key issues must be considered: authorship and intent. Undoubtedly, those who subscribe to Barthes's notion of the "dead author" will strenously object to my use of the term "intent," claiming that it is impossible to know an author's true motives in producing a text. However, properly situating a text within its historical context can provide information useful for making an informed judgments concerning an author's agenda.

Although the texts considered in this study were produced by different authors at different points in history, they shared a common agenda: legitimization. Kūkai's early autobiographical writings were an attempt to legitimize his renunciation of Confucianism in favor of Buddhism. After receiving a transmission in esoteric Buddhism from Hui-guo in China, Kūkai produced texts that legitimized himself as an esoteric Buddhist. Toward the end of his life, his writings attempted to erase his Confucian past and recast him as a Buddhist prodigy from birth. After Kūkai's death, Shinzei, his lead disciple, compiled the *Shōryōshū* and allegedly wrote the *Kūkai Sōzuden*, texts which served to further legitimize Kūkai's esoteric lineage. Later, in the

medieval period, Tōdaiji revivalists like Sōshō incorporated Kūkai's biography to show Kūkai's ties to Nara Buddhism. Finally, Kokan Shiren prominently placed Kūkai's biography into a compilation comprised primarily of Zen hagiographies, in an attempt to show that Zen, which was relatively new in Japan at the time, was a legitimate part of Buddhism.

However, any text that attempts to legitimize a person or an institution requires plausible narrative. As I mentioned in the introduction to this study, my purpose in researching Kūkai legends was not to extract the "real" Kūkai from the one of legend or to make any claims concerning the veracity of these legends. Instead, I wanted to examine how these legends were written, transmitted, and re-written in order to seem plausible to its audience and further institutional agendas. The literary concept I chose to analyze plausibility was Gerard Genette's notion of *vraisemblance.*

In his theory of narrative, Genette proposes three types of narrative: *vraisemblable,* motivated, and arbitrary. Even if it is entirely fictional, a*vraisemblable* narrative is plausible without narrative intrusion because it conforms to the societally conditioned expectations of the reader. On the other hand, a motivated narrative requires the narrator to assume a more active role in explicating aspects of the narrative that do not conform to the reader's expectations. Finally, Genette proposes the arbitrary narrative, which lacks *vraisemblance* yet is not motivated. By Genette's own admission, whether a narrative is *vraisemblant* or arbitrary depends on the reader's perceptions.

Throughout this study, I applied Genette's theories of narrative to several Kūkai autobiographical and hagiographic texts to see how *vraisemblable* and motivated narratives created a plausible Kūkai legend. The

following tables summarize my findings:

Table 1: Kūkai's Autobiographical Texts

Text	*Vraisemblant*	Motivated
Sangō Shiki Overall: *Vraisemblant*	Use of diction/overall structure of the text Allusions to Chinese sources Use of poetry	
Shōrai Mokuroku Overall: Motivated	Kūkai's vision on the night of Hui-guo's death	Description of Hui-guo Kūkai's*Abhiseka* ceremony Hui-guo's relationship with Amoghavajra
Goyuigō Overall: *Vraisemblant*	Divine conception Use of dreams to claim being a Buddhist from his childhood Discovery of the *Mahāvairocana sutra* in a dream Zhēn-he chastised in a dream for doubting Kūkai	Revised childhood narrative Rationale for attending the State Confucian College despite being a Buddhist

Table 2: Texts Written After Kūkai's Death and Medieval Appropriations

Text	*Vraisemblant*	Motivated
Kūkai's Epitaph to Hui-guo in the *Henjō Hakki Shōryōshū* Overall: Motivated	Hui-guo and Kūkai's pledge to propagate esoteric Buddhism	Kūkai's description of Hui-guo's lineage Kūkai's description of the efficacy of Hui-guo's esoteric rituals
Kūkai Sōzuden Overall: Motivated		Description of Kūkai's family history Kūkai's service to the court as an esoteric practitioner Kūkai's esoteric lineage, going back to Māhavairocana
Nihon Kōsōden Yōmonshō Overall: *Vraisemblant*	Sōshō's use of quotation as a means to create plausibility Kūkai's family lineage	Kūkai's involvement with Tōdaiji Kūkai's placement in the index
Genkō Shakusho Overall: *Vraisemblant*		Placing Zen biographies within the larger context of East Asian Buddhist history

Kūkai and his biographers used a combination of*vraisemblable* and motivated narratives to justify him as an esoteric Buddhist leader. An

interesting aspect of Kūkai biographies is that *vraisemblable* narratives were used to make the more "fantastic" aspects of his life seem plausible. One example is the way Kūkai used dreams in the *Goyuigō* to prove that he was the descendant of an eminent Indian monk. Indeed, it seems that the most 'fantastic' elements of Kūkai's biography were presented in a very blase, matter-of-fact manner. On the other hand, motivated narratives were frequently used to describe Hui-guo's background. Perhaps the authors felt that since Hui-kuo was not Japanese, further explication on his background was necessary.

Although Genette's theory of *vraisemblance* provided an interesting tool with which to analyze Kūkai biographies, it does have its limits. First, some may question whether a theory of narrative centered around nineteenth century French novels can be seamlessly applied to Heian and Kamakura period texts. Since Genette is a product of the Western tradition, it is relatively easy for him to determine what was *vraisemblant* in a French novel. However, it is somewhat more complicated to make judgments about what the Heian and Kamakura reader considered to be plausible narrative. Therefore, I have tried to provide as much historical and religious context as possible before determining on whether any given narrative is*vraisemblant.* Also, I have expanded Genette's definition of *vraisemblance* to include rhetoric, since presentation was just as important as content in making Kūkai biographies seem plausible to the reader.

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